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THE MANITOBAN

HENRY H. BASHFORD

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THE MANITOBAN: A ROMANCE

By HENRY H. BASHFORD

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JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD
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By John Lane

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To

M. E. S.

This Book is humbly Dedicated

And I would sing the song of all creation,
A brave sky and a glad wind, blowing by,
A clear trail and an hour for meditation,
A long day and the joy to make it fly,
A hard task and the muscle to achieve it,
A fierce noon and a well-contented gloam,
A good strife and no great regret to leave it,
A still night and the far red lights of home.

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THE BOOK OF HIS BOYHOOD

I

I

A WINDY river, dimpled with sunlight, bordered by deep meadows, and guarded by great swaying woods; a towing-path, green and fragrant; a hedge stretching down to the water, broken by a gate half open; an afternoon of May, and she in her red tam-o'-shanter with her sweet grave lips:

"And you are really going?"

The brown eyes were darker than usual, for this was sorrow, and she had not known what it meant until to-day.

"Really going."

He lifted his head hopefully, drawing a deep breath of the sweet spring air, and there was triumph in his utterance.

Then he looked into the face of the girl before him.

She had not grown to hide her feelings, and even his callow eyes could read the pain there. He was verging on earliest manhood, the manhood that looks out upon the world with little more than sixth-form understanding, a little superior, a little suspicious, wholly confident.

And she was only a child.

Nevertheless her sorrow stirred him strangely. He stooped by the river and plucked a cuckoo-flower, sticking it boyishly into her frock, as he had been wont to do; but to-day the action seemed strangely more significant, almost sacred.

"To Canada?"

He laughed.

"Don't be tragic, Ethel," he said. "It's not the grave, or even the goal — it's what I've longed for ever since I can remember. It's the goal of my desires. And it will be just the sort of life I love. And in time I'll get land, and cattle, and wheat, and all that, you know, and perhaps become a big man out there, and then I'll come back and—and——"

He pulled up suddenly, for these unuttered dreams demanded a more serious consideration. And so they stood silent awhile by the gate across the towing-path, under the kind old trees, that had heard so many secrets, and held them all inviolate.

The morning had been like many mornings of holidays unnumbered.

They had strolled round the garden, the farm yard, and the orchard.

He had admired the tortoise, and the rabbits, and the pony; he had scoffed at her tennis, and

she had proved her superiority in finding bird's nests, his eyes being dulled by the long term's lack of practice. And then, at lunch, the great news had come, and he had been exultant as the gates of this promised land had swung open before him, with its visions of limitless prairies and its glamour of galloping and gold. This morning they had rambled about, quarrelling at times, occasionally at one, mutually recriminating, scolding, admiring, as old comrades should.

It was hardly thinkable that three words could make so great a difference, raise so strange and nebulous a barrier, forcing self-revelations upon them, that held them thus in a silence half ashamed. And on such an afternoon too, so golden and debonnair and buoyant, so evidently unfitted to be taken seriously.

Why think about to-morrow and the next day?

"Come on down to the back-water and stir up the moor hens. It's a beastly shame to waste the whole afternoon, and see, the boys have left the boat by the willows. Don't look so melancholy."

She threw back the hair from her forehead. "I'm not melancholy. I'm so glad—you've got what you wanted. I—hope you'll have lots of riding, and all that, and that they won't work you too hard."

He paddled the old boat leisurely down the stream.

"I don't care how hard I work at that sort of thing, you know."

She nodded. A hatred of books was common to these two, and both bore the comeliness bestowed by sun and wind.

Presently:

"I say, Ethel!"

"Yes."

"You—you'll write to a fellow sometimes?"

She was still a child; but the woman in her was quickening already.

"I'm awfully bad at letters," she murmured.

His voice grew insistent.

"But it doesn't matter about grammar and spelling and composition, and all that, when you write to me."

Silence again.

"Letters will be pretty welcome out there, I expect," he said.

And again this strange perplexing silence, punctuated by the rumble of the oars against the rowlocks.

At last he rested, letting the boat drift at will.

"You know, Ethel," he said, solemnly, "I think this is the greatest day of my life so far—greater than the day I got my footer colours,

greater than the day when I made my first fifty for the eleven, greater than any of them, for it's sort of beginning the real thing, you see. And I'm gladder—gladder than I've ever been about anything." He spoke boyishly, and paused, boyishly ashamed of his want of reticence, and not quite sure of the truth of his words. And was he after all so very glad?

Fragrance of wind, fragrance of river, fragrance of wood, a white sail far up the stream, bellying to the wind, a red tam-o'-shanter against the bending willows, two serious brown eyes.

"It'll be jolly hard to leave home. I shall be —be beastly sorry, you know."

He spoke slowly, as if the thought had been a new one, though it had lurked in the background of his mind all the afternoon.

"So—so you won't forget to write?"

She shook her head.

"I won't forget—ever," she said.

And they shook hands over the bargain as good comrades should.

The strange afternoon wore slowly to its red and golden close.

In the twilight Charlie pulled the old boat into the house at the end of the garden. Here their ways parted—his to the rectory, half a mile away, her's to her home, close at hand.

"You'll be late for tea, Ethel," he said.

"I don't care."

He laughed, dropping back into his old manner.

"I don't——"

"Hush! They are calling you." The sound of a voice came down to them through the dusk, but Charlie held her arms, and to-night she did not struggle with him.

"Don't hurry. You—you're looking quite pretty to-night, Ethel."

Then he stooped and kissed her cheek.

"Gold and galloping, fame and fortune——" the dreams crowded back to his mind again, too sweet surely for imprisonment.

Through the gates ajar, the possibilities seemed so probable—nay, almost already within grasp.

So he told her about them, asking presently for a promise.

Then he kissed her again.

"Good night."

"Good night."

She ran up the path, for the voice had grown commanding, and Charlie turned thoughtfully homewards, already not quite sure of himself.

"For she's such a child," he said.

Nevertheless he stooped and picked a second cuckoo-flower.

It seemed clean and strong, and had been blowing healthily by the pathway, and he put it in his buttonhole, meaning to keep it for remembrance' sake.

But he was busy next day and forgot about it.

II

II

Over Carroll, asleep on its single line of railway, the June sun hung merciless and unblinking, nor was there on any horizon a cloud that might presently veil its brilliance.

The great world, golden and brown, rolling lazily through the hot hours, stretched itself into sleepy distances, purple and indefinite.

A few farm-houses, scattered sparsely over the bosom of the prairie, shone white and unpicturesque, backed by log stables and low stacks of last year's hay.

Far down the line a little cloud of smoke and dust and the twinkle of metal revealed the approach of the day's express.

It seemed to be travelling drowsily over the sunburned plains.

In the station yard a tired bronco stood motionless between the shafts of a buggy, the two flinging a sharp-cut shadow on the white dust.

On the platform, four or five men, blue-shirted, with broad hats, lounged impassively, giving no signs of life, save for an occasional expectoration of brown tobacco-juice.

And they were waiting for the day's chiefest event.

And when at last the great engine panted up beside the platform, with its bell swinging and a considerable commotion of brakes and steam, the passengers who alighted were only two.

The one, a wrinkled old farmer, self-conscious in a boiled shirt, with a stiff collar, and a tie of many colours, nodded to the watchers in the shadow, and presently mounted the waiting buggy. The other, a lad, fresh-coloured, but pale by contrast to his swarthy observers, wearing a collar unknown to Carroll, and neatly clad in a flannel suit that was obviously foreign, stood undecided on the wooden platform. Somebody spat.

"Reg'lar dude," he observed slowly.

The others were silent, regarding the passenger with grave eyes.

Presently he summoned up courage.

"Is there a porter anywhere"? he asked.

For a minute no one replied. Then a voice appealed to the silence.

"Is there a portah anywhe-ah?"

There was the faintest gleam of teeth round the little circle, but nobody laughed.

Charlie grew uncomfortable.

Life had become a little bewildering on these

great plains, nor did these silent Canadians seem willing to solve its immediate problems.

"How am I to get to Mr. Luke's?" he asked again, addressing the nearest.

"Are you goin' to work fer old man Luke?" he asked.

"Yes."

He looked round with a smile.

"You'll like it," he said.

"It's like heaven," said another.

"There's no night there," observed a third.

Charlie looked from one to another, at the lean hard faces, the grave eyes, the white teeth, and he grew red, his heart sinking strangely. He felt very insignificant and alone facing this new phase of life. Then a fresh voice behind him asked cheerfully:

"Are you lookin' fer old man Luke?"

Charlie turned round quickly, glad to recognize a friendly tone. He looked into blue eyes at a little lower level than his own; they laughed at him above a pair of ruddy brown cheeks.

"Yes," he said.

"Well, I guess the old man ain't in town, but Jack Luke's hitchin' up right now at the livery. I'll show you."

Charlie looked at him gratefully, a robust little figure, clad solely in a white cotton shirt, rolled up at the elbows over a pair of sturdy brown

arms, and an ancient pair of knickerbockers surmounting dusty brown legs.

His bare feet were well apart, and his hands thrust comfortably into his pockets. He appeared to be surveying the little group of loungers behind Charlie with the profoundest contempt.

"What's the good o' askin' them?" he questioned. "Eh — what's the good o' askin' them? They're no good anyway, not one o' them. They're just bummers."

"You take care, young Roddy, or you'll die sudden," said one.

Roddy swept him with a pitying glance.

"Well, I guess that's better'n dyin' o' overeatin', an' doin' nothin'," he observed pointedly. And at this there was a roar of laughter. He grasped Charlie's arm.

"Come on," he said, "or we won't catch him."

They crossed the station yard, Roddy's feet falling silently in the hot dust.

"I say it's awfully good of you," began Charlie, but Roddy interrupted him.

"That's my nature," he observed complacently. Then with a sideway glance at Charlie's brown boots and flannel suit, "Just come from the old country?"

"Yes."

Roddy grinned, but made no further comment until they had crossed the road—Carroll's one

thoroughfare, known magnificently as Main street; then:

"I'm Roddy Laville," he said. "What's your name?"

"Charlie West."

"Well, Charlie, I guess you'll have to hustle some at old man Luke's. He's a fair terror."

But Charlie smiled. He was getting his sixth-form confidence back again, and this barelegged youngster of fifteen was not going to frighten him.

"That's all right," he said.

"He works his hired men terrible, 'specially greenhorns."

Charlie winced at the offensive word, and for a moment felt inclined to resent it. But reflection bade him cherish this first friend of his.

"He'll make you saw," continued Roddy.

"Saw?"

"Yes. He's always got wood on hand to break his greenhorns in, even in summer time. An' till you can plough there's nothin' else goin' till hayin'. There's on'y breakin' an' fallow, an' his own boys does that, I guess. He's keepin' you for hayin' an' harvest."

Charlie looked at his companion, envious of his knowledge.

"Can you plough?" he asked.

Roddy grinned.

"Well, I should smile," he said.

In the yard before the livery stable a young man was hitching up a pony, stooping over the traces.

The little mare was slender and sorrel, standing impatiently, with ears drawn back.

"That's Jack Luke's driver—she's a daisy," said Roddy, screwing up his blue eyes and looking admiringly at her slender, lean flanks and trim expectant hoofs.

The young man heard him and looked over his shoulder.

"Hullo, Roddy! How's yourself?" he said.

Roddy was obviously prospering.

"Here's your greenhorn," he observed, indicating Charlie, whose face was pink and flushed under his straw hat.

Jack Luke rose, with one hand on the mare's back, and looked silently at this newcomer.

His gaze travelled seriously from the straw hat with the school colours upon its ribbon to the brown boots, well made and spotless, and back again to Charlie's half angry eyes.

Then he held out a brown hand.

"I'm glad to see you."

"His name's Charlie," interposed Roddy.

"I'm glad you've come, Charlie. Father'll be surprised some. We didn't expect you this week; but it's all right. I'm glad you've come."

They shook hands, and Charlie climbed up into the buckboard.

"Hold her nose a minute, Roddy," said Jack, lifting up Charlie's bag and some scattered parcels of his own.

The little mare, impatient to be gone, and recognizing the strange hand upon her bridle began pawing the dust, shifting restlessly in the light harness.

A hard hoof fell suddenly upon Roddy's bare toes, and the boy jumped back with a sudden shout, still holding the bridle. Then with an eloquent abandon he reviled the mare and all her ancestors, consigning the whole company to so lurid a destiny that Charlie gazed at him open-mouthed, almost shuddering.

Jack Luke listened impassively.

"You should be spryer with them feet o' yours, Roddy," he said. "An' you swear terrible fer a young 'un."

Roddy laughed, the white teeth shining wholesomely in his round face.

"Blast her eyes," he observed, looking ruefully at his bruised toes. Then he handed up the reins.

"So long, Jack," he said. "Good luck, Charlie, an' don't bust yourself."

As they swung into the white roadway, Charlie looked back into the stable yard and waved his

hand, but Roddy was nursing his battered foot and did not see him, and thus his first friend passed from view. Jack Luke proved a silent companion, keeping his eyes upon the trail, watching the mare's stride, and skilfully dodging the deeper ruts.

The little town was soon behind them, the wooden houses with their painted fronts, the great elevators, the hot sidewalk, the long stables, the strange vehicles, the loungers lean and satirical, Roddy, kindly and brown and blasphemous, all fastened indelibly upon Charlie's memory, an abiding impression above the gateway of his new life.

And now the prairie, stretching about him with so boundless an immensity, wrapping him with its incense, hot and strange and fragrant, spread before his eyes in a mosaic of gold and emerald, treeless utterly, save for an occasional bluff of silver poplars—oh! it was a wonderful day that laid this new world at his feet.

For the first three or four miles he held his peace, filling his lungs with the unsullied air, gaining a gradual strange exhilaration as their way lay deeper into the plains. Occasionally, passing a team at work on prairie or summer fallow, Jack would pull up to exchange a word with some sunburned comrade, who would lean with brawny arms upon the side of the buckboard,

talking leisurely, and with the soft burr and lingering r's that fell so curiously upon Charlie's English ears.

Once a bright-eyed gopher, lithe and yellow, flashed across the trail, and Charlie asked what it was, leaning out with eager eyes to watch its progress. Jack smiled, telling briefly what he knew about it, and this, loosening their tongues, led to a long succession of queries and replies, given eagerly and responded to with the slow gravity that seemed to characterize all men's speech upon these great plains.

Twelve miles from Carroll they drove by a little lake, blue and quiet, surrounded by a clump of stunted oaks and slender poplars, and the trail led through a farmyard, passing between a low log house and some crooked sod-roofed stables. Two or three children, with flaxen hair, looked at them curiously, and Jack waved his whip to them.

"Icelanders," he observed briefly. And in answer to Charlie's question, told him that there were many of these people settled hereabouts. On a low hill behind them a little wooden building shone in the sun, and Jack explained that it was their Lutheran chapel.

On later Sabbaths Charlie saw many of them, gaily clad, travelling in wagons, gathering by various trails to their worship in the wooden

church. Two miles further on they swung round once more beside a great field of rising wheat, lusty and strong and burdened with promise. Jack's eyes grew proud, and Charlie learned that they had reached their destination. On a low hillside two teams were at work upon the virgin prairie, driven by Jack's younger brothers, and Charlie could see their white shirts gleaming as they walked slowly down the furrows behind the heavy oaken ploughs.

A little distance away stood the house, log-built, below, but wooden and shingle-roofed.

Stacked neatly in the yard was a large pile of wood, cut and split and arranged in tiers, and beside it a load or two of uncut poplars. On the saw-horse gleamed a buck-saw, and an axe with a twisted handle lay half buried in chips under the shadow of the wood-pile.

As they drove up, a small boy came out of the stables, greeting Jack, gazing gravely at Charlie, and in the doorway of the house lounged a half-grown girl, barefooted, with tangled hair and frank eyes.

At the sound of their arrival her mother, thin-faced and kindly, joined her and stood blinking out upon them, guarding her eyes from the sunlight slanting down between the buildings.

"This is Charlie West," said Jack.

The old woman came out, peering up into Charlie's English face as he stood, hat in hand, regarding his new home.

"I'm glad you've come," she said. "Come right in an' tell me how you liked your journey. That's Becca, my youngest girl. Come right in."

Charlie followed her first into the house, and thence, where she presently led him, into the lean-to kitchen.

She was busy preparing the evening meal, but talked ceaselessly, giving Charlie time to survey his new surroundings, as he sat upon a backless chair watching her at work.

They were a strange couple: she with her kilted skirts, bare-armed, bent above the stove; he, swinging a clean straw hat, daintily clad, with hands unsoiled.

So this was the log shanty of his dreams, this confusion of pots and pans, earth floor and broken windows. Looking back into the dwelling-room he found it carpetless, a dismantled stove, used only in the winter, dominating the centre of the floor. A cracked looking-glass and a picture of John Wesley were the solitary mural decorations, but a couple of guns swung upon the rafters under the ceiling. On the bare table sundry plates and knives lay prepared for the evening meal, and on a cupboard in the cor-

ner rested a large Bible and a copy of the Carroll *Gazette*.

In the window stood a sewing-machine, and near it a stairway leading to the bedroom above.

At home it would have been the dwelling of a gardener or farm-labourer, he thought, not that of an owner of land; and looking round upon its cheerlessness his heart sank already at closer grips with this new democracy.

His glance rested again on the old woman. Some pieces of pork lay bubbling in a large frying-pan on one corner of the cooking stove, and in another she was deftly browning pancakes, adding them by couples to the growing pile upon a neighbouring plate. Her silver grey hair, straggling about her forehead, occasionally strayed into her eyes, and she would throw back her head, laughing at him and making apologies for her appearance.

"You'll have to get used to us," she said, "an' it's rough livin' out here."

Charlie smiled, telling her untruthfully that he did not care, and she looked over her shoulder and smiled back at him.

"Now, I guess your own ma's a bit tidier," she said.

The sudden vision of a sweet face and shawl-clad figure and the cool parlour of a Berkshire rectory that swept across his mind held him for

a moment dumb. He could almost hear the restful voice and the break in it as it had bidden him farewell.

But the old woman's bird-like eyes were upon him and she seemed to have guessed his thoughts, laying a gnarled hand upon his shoulder.

"You'll be findin' it strange at first, Charlie," she said. "Do you like pancakes?"

Charlie nodded, smiling in spite of himself.

For already to this latest child of hers the prairie had given her first gift of eager, healthy hunger, and presently, with unaccustomed hands, he found himself helping her, turning over the slabs of pork, with their inspiring, cheerful aroma, the immediate prospect of refreshment shining out of these sordid surroundings, their brightest feature.

It was only when they gathered at last round the clothless table that the lumps of pork, fat and utterly salt, filled him with nausea, so that he was glad to stay his hunger upon hot biscuits and pancakes.

The whole family had assembled round the supper table—the four boys and the girl, and they ate silently, gazing at Charlie with shy, furtive glances.

To him they all seemed to be moulded on one pattern, built in varying scales according to their several ages—brown, blue-eyed, and robust.

Looking from one to another he envied the firm set of their jaws, their young, round muscles and obvious physical fitness. The talk, such as it was, was largely unintelligible to him, touching on shears and earth-boards and coulters, smacking of furrow and headland. After supper the old man bade him come outside, leading him to the wood-pile.

"Ever used a saw?"

Charlie shook his head.

The old man jerked a poplar into the saw-horse, cutting off several lengths, which he presently split with a blunt axe, Charlie watching him with dubious eyes.

"Guess you can get goin' on that to-morrow," he said, when he had finished. "We hadn't time to get it all cleared up before the frost broke, an' it's got to be done by hayin'."

So this was to be his first work upon the prairie, and the prospect of it seemed utterly distasteful. Left to his own devices, he strolled down to the stables, where two of the boys were currying down the teams that he had seen upon the ploughing.

The diffused scent of hay and straw was not unpleasant, and he lingered for some time, watching the deft hands and careless affection with which the boys went about their stable duties. When at last he came out upon the

yard again, the sound of bells fell upon his ear, and following the trail a little way he came upon the old corral, where the cows, milked some time before by Becca and her mother, were standing gratefully in the blue smoke of some smouldering wet straw, grunting contentedly and swinging lazy tails about their flanks.

The prairie lay bathed now in a wonderful tender light, and already in the deepening sky some early stars had crept into being, shimmering like jewels, pale and remote, in a setting infinitely soft.

Here and there upon the plains, growing swiftly dim, lay drowsy trails of smoke, smudges of straw and manure, in which the cattle might seek refuge from mosquitoes.

The night held no sound but the low breathing of the cows in the corral, and the croaking of the frogs in a slough hard by, and upon Charlie, leaning by the gate, the darkness and its vast silence fell with a strange awe and an irresistible sense of loneliness. It was hard to realize that after these long days of travel he had at length reached his destination.

In the still night, some of the scenes so swiftly passed and already half forgotten came back to his mind: a concert on board, light-hearted, running on into the early hours; the ephemeral swift camaraderie of steamer society; the long

railway journey by the giant forests, and deep inland lakes; a brown tent, with a couple of dark-skinned Indians; Winnipeg, with its arc lights, and brand-new self-importance; a fight which he had witnessed there between two olive-cheeked half-breeds; the leisurely journey over the plains; Carroll, with its ordeal of staring eyes; Roddy and the little sorrel; and now this shabby log-house, uncarpeted, sordid, and bare of the most primitive refinements; the old woman, crude and illiterate, and the barefooted girl, calling him Charlie with so complete an intimacy, accepting him with such an absolute familiarity as one of themselves; already the old traditions were tottering, and should they fall about his ears what would remain to him? Face to face with life on these solitary ranges, was he, indeed, superior to these brown-skinned young Canadians? Or was he an alien in this country with no social frontiers, infinitely below them in his mastery of the essentials of success?

These were strange thoughts, indeed, forcing themselves insistently on his unwilling mind. Well, at the worst he could go back to his Berkshire home. But he shut his teeth. No, he would never do that, never admit failure.

Suddenly he saw a lantern wavering through the darkness from the stable to the house, and the sight of it reminded him of bed. He turned

slowly down the trail. It was all so different, so disappointing: to-morrow he had thought to gallop upon unbounded ranges, and, behold, he was to saw wood.

In the bedroom which he was to share with two of the boys he found them already half undressed. There was, then, no evening life here, no fireside talk, no books, or music, or recreation.

His bed-fellow, with down-bent head, was kneeling at his prayers, a habit that Charlie with other childish customs had given up on board.

Evinced in this shy Canadian boy it struck him unexpectedly.

Then he undressed carefully, donning a suit of pyjamas that brought wonder into two pairs of sleepy blue eyes.

Nor did the prairie withhold from him her second gift of ready and dreamless slumber, and in a few minutes he had forgotten that after many days he had found his promised land.

III

III

Dick Blackett sat at his shanty door looking out meditatively upon the blue waters of Silver Lake.

Down the southward trail old man Luke with his buckboard and pony was growing rapidly smaller, but the letters that he had left with Blackett lay unopened in his hands.

There were but two, and the one was in a handwriting familiar enough. Blackett regarded it reverently.

The other was addressed in a bold and daring style, which for the moment baffled memory.

And yet it seemed familiar. Then he opened it carefully, and, catching sight of the crest and address, wondered suddenly at his forgetfulness, for who indeed could be the writer but Cyril Trevelyan—Trevelyan of the ardent soul, Trevelyan, the idealist, the social reformer?

Blackett smiled and wondered, for though they had been the closest of friends at school and college, yet letters had been rare between them, and their ways in life had diverged strangely.

Misfortune and bereavement had driven

him to Manitoba, where his lessened income had proved of far greater value to him, and his love of solitude and labour had already sent him far on the road to prosperity.

But Trevelyan, leaving Cambridge, had become secretary and man of affairs to his uncle, Sir George Laville, banker, landowner, and philanthropist, and had brought all his boyish enthusiasm into the conduct of Sir George's social schemes for his fellow men's redemption.

On the one or two occasions of Blackett's visit to England Trevelyan's eagerness and brilliance had left him a little breathless, but had nevertheless always strengthened his belief in the honesty and loftiness of his old friend's aims and purposes. Now he read his letter with some curiosity.

My Dear Blackett:

You will doubtless be surprised at hearing from me after so long a silence, and though our friendship, I am happy to think, depends on nothing so flimsy as notepaper, yet I have often felt some sort of reproach—perhaps you have shared it—for never having continued in letters those interesting conversations which we had on your last visit.

Your visits, by the way, are growing so rare that I fear your western plains are really proving too strong for you. And now to the subject of my letter. As you probably know, Sir George

of late years has come to leave his affairs more entirely in my hands. He is growing old, the pleasures of his library are entering more largely into his life, and, as a consequence my work has been considerably increased. Now, as perhaps you are aware, Sir George has only two sons, the elder of whom is a chronic invalid, and a bachelor, spending most of his time in continental watering-places, endeavouring to prolong a life that must inevitably close in a year or two. The younger, Henry, left home many years ago under circumstances to which I need not refer. Sir George has been obdurate in his refusal to see him again, although an allowance is made to him in quarterly cheques. And it is because it has fallen to me to despatch these remittances to an address in Manitoba, which I have just learned is also your own, that I have written this letter to you. For Sir George has been pondering a good deal lately as to the disposal of his interests after his death. The elder son is, of course, out of the question, and though the entailed property, a few inconsiderable acres, must of necessity fall to Henry, Sir George is firmly resolved that he shall have nothing else.

He has, however, recently thrown out hints that he would like to learn if Henry has gotten himself an heir, and also to discover something more of his present circumstances than we have been able to gather. And so, as a friend and in confidence, I am writing to you for the help I feel sure you can give us. You will, of course, see that all enquiries are necessarily tentative,

and that anything in the nature of a hope or promise must be absolutely out of the question at present.

The letter ended with some references to mutual friends and a reminiscence of days at Harrow. It was addressed from the Dorrington Club, in Mayfair, and was signed by Cyril Trevelyan.

Blackett pondered its contents for some while. It was curious that he should never have associated Sir George, whom he knew very well, with the blue-eyed bleary giant who was so familiar a figure in the Carroll hotels. The contrast was strange and a little pitiful. And yet, as Blackett knocked the ashes out of his pipe, he wondered if there were indeed a saloon in Canada that had not set its seal upon some such story as this.

IV

IV

THE shady side of the dry-goods store was always a favourite trysting-place for the youth of Carroll, and during the noon-day spell, when their elders were smoking in quiet places or snatching a few moments of slumber, a little group of sun-tanned youngsters was usually collected at this spot.

Their shrill voices suggested no desire for repose, nor did their sturdy limbs seem in any way conscious of the prevailing drowsiness. On this occasion, Roddy, standing in the roadway with his blue eyes screwed up into slits above his cheeks, was blinking contentedly in the sunlight, his hat pushed back over his short brown hair, his hands buried, English fashion, in his pockets. He was the complacent centre of interest to some half dozen barelegged boys and girls lounging in the shadow, and displayed a lean brown shin crossed by an angry weal.

"Pete Lafayette is a son of a swine," he observed, and there was a murmur of assent.

"An' what did he hit you for, Roddy?" asked somebody.

"He knocked off my hat with his whip as he drove by, an' I called after him, 'Dirty old half-

breed!' an' then he cut back, an' I hadn't time to dodge him, an' he did that——" Here Roddy ended in language entirely unrespectable, sticking out a bare leg for inspection and pity.

"Hush, Roddy, you shouldn't swear," said a little girl.

She spoke in shocked tones, but Roddy smiled superiorly.

"Guess you'd ha' done if he'd hit you like that—guess anyone would ha' done."

The boys looked at him admiringly, though a little awed at the recklessness of his language, for Roddy scorned the half measures that at present marked their own furthest outposts in the realms of blasphemy. Moreover, he was revolving a plug of real tobacco between his teeth, while they for the most part were satisfying their young propensities with chewing gum, and this attainment alone was sufficient to place Roddy in a position of desirable supremacy.

Indeed, if it had not been for the unfortunately unanimous condemnation passed upon him by parental opinion, Roddy would long ago have been enthroned as the uncrowned king of juvenile Carroll.

As matters were, however, there was perhaps no child present who had not been warned at one time or another as to the undesirability of Roddy as a bosom companion. And thus it had

come about that Roddy, while entirely at his ease with all classes of this western community, had but few friends in any.

The recognized toughs of the place laughed at him, admired him, and treated him to black plug; the Methodists had made sundry strenuous but hitherto unsuccessful raids upon his soul; the Presbyterians, shaking their heads, had prophesied dismally; the mothers collectively, while letting him saw their wood, drive in their cows, or do odd jobs about the house, had always suppressed with an iron hand any rising intimacy between him and their own children; the fathers, to a man, said it was a pity that he was so evidently going the way of his father; and in their hearts they loved him. His father's farm being a little more than a mile out of the town, Roddy was a frequent visitor to Carroll, spending indeed as much of his time as was not absolutely required by his parents in doing whatever work came to his hand, a remunerative occupation that was greatly more desirable in his eyes than unrecompensed labour upon the farm at home.

And since his father possessed only one team, which he drove himself, when sufficiently his own master to be able to do so, Roddy found a good deal of time to satisfy his desire for the companionships of town.

Henry Laville, a big invertebrate, younger son of good English stock, was a remittance man of the worst type, receiving every quarter a cheque sufficiently large to obviate the absolute necessity of farming his land well, and thus, since it was largely expended in drinks of varying size and quality, perfectly successful in keeping him perpetually and to the majority of his neighbours contemptibly poor.

Yet he had certain qualities that commanded some amount of respect. He was kindly and honourable. His wife, a pale, silent woman, whom he had married in Eastern Canada, made no complaints of ill-treatment to the few friends who visited her.

No man had heard him lie, or known him make a shady bargain, and these in a Manitoban town were attributes beyond praise. And he was recognized as being the best fighter in Carroll, bringing an English training to the assistance of the magnificent physique with which nature, ever prodigal to younger sons, had endowed him.

Regarded as a parent, he was admittedly a failure. Twice he had thrashed Roddy for some small dishonesty, but these had been the only occasions upon which he had seen fit to assume any of the greater responsibilities of fatherhood.

And Roddy, adoring his father, had deemed

it no small, if a somewhat painful, honour to suffer at his hands.

Suddenly upon the little group in the shadow came Henry Laville, swinging heavy-footed down the wooden sidewalk. Seeing Roddy, he pulled up short, asking him why he was not at home looking after the horses and preparing to plough upon the summer fallow during the afternoon. Consigning him to perdition, he bade him hasten with all possible speed unless he wished for an immediate pass to a fate that would assuredly be his some day. Then he apologized for swearing, laughing at the children's eyes — half shocked, half scared — and betook himself to the bank, whence Roddy gathered that the cheque had arrived, and that for two or three days the management of the farm would fall upon his own shoulders.

"I guess I must be goin'," he said, and shouldered sturdily down the hot road, whistling a cheerful air, well content with life.

And as he made his way home the express leaving Carroll on its western journey passed him, the great cars swinging noisily on the metals.

He glanced at them, incuriously, watching them with the nonchalance of custom. Presently they would grow small upon the prairies and disappear, as they had always done on days

unnumbered. Even so with careless eyes we watch the incidents upon whose unguessed foundations the whole fabric of our future is to rest.

So Roddy, well at ease, whistled peacefully down the homeward trail; and in an hour, white-shirted and shouting shrilly to his horses, was footing it manfully behind his father's plough. Presently two persons—a woman and a child—followed his footsteps down the trail. At the ploughing they stopped, waiting until Roddy, wondering, reached the end of the furrow.

"Is yon Laville's?" asked the woman. Roddy nodded, and noticed that her cheeks were thin and her eyes haunted and careworn.

But the little girl was ruddy, with red lips, and when she smiled her teeth were as white as his own. Roddy liked looking at her, and wondered if they would stay for supper, if they would be there when he came back from work.

"Is Mrs. Laville at home?"

"Why, yes."

Roddy was a little surprised. The idea of there being any other possibility had not occurred to him.

The woman thanked him, turning away rather wearily he thought.

The little girl looked back once for a moment, as though she would like to linger by the ploughing.

Roddy pursued his way for a round or two, pondering over these strangers and their errand, guessing readily enough that they had but an hour or two ago arrived on the train, wondering what they were now saying to his mother in the little shanty down the trail. Presently the girl came out, standing bareheaded in the doorway, hesitant apparently, but then coming leisurely towards him. He was halfway down the furrow, and she made her way across the untilled fallow.

He noticed the weeds, breast-high, swaying greenly about her, as she walked with lifted arms. He thought she would be about twelve years old and it was pretty to see her with her tangled hair shining in the sunlight.

When she came close, he saw that her eyes were very wide and black, and said continually: "I want to play."

His western traditions forbade a pause midway upon the furrow, but she held alongside, looking at him a little shyly.

Presently:

"You're Roddy?" she asked.

"Yes."

He felt strangely tongue-tied, a new and perplexing experience.

"I got so tired," she said, "listenin' to them talkin', your mother an' mine, an' they didn't

notice me any, an' so I thought I'd come out an'—an' watch the ploughin'."

Roddy grunted, keeping a steady eye upon the old chestnut mare. She was inclined to pull out.

"Say, may I drive?"

Roddy was dubious.

"Down east we often have some one drivin' in front."

Roddy looked a little superior.

"I guess one man can do it all out here," he said.

Then he relented, thinking she looked wistful.

"You can if you like," he said, "on'y look out fer Rosy—she's always pullin' out so. Come back, you old bitch."

He handed her the reins, glancing at her awkwardly.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Hope."

"That's a funny name."

"You see, when I was born, mother was feelin' sad—an' there was an old doctor there—an' he tried to cheer her—an' so they called me Hope."

Roddy nodded wisely.

"I see."

They held on down the furrow; then:

"You've travelled some, I expect?" suggested Roddy.

"Big Tree Camp was where I was born," said the girl. "Then we went to Duty City. That's

in Michigan. Then we was on a railway. Then we lived in Detroit. Then we was in a factory in Chicago. Then we was on another railway. Then we came here."

Roddy looked at her wide-eyed.

"I say, you *have* seen somethin'," he said.

She nodded.

"Lots an' lots o' things—fights an' things. I saw a man shoot a man once. That was in a camp on a railway where mother was cookin' an' washin' an' that."

Roddy's eyes grew bright.

"Tell me," he said.

And she told him, dwelling seriously on those parts which, being bloody, would seem more likely to interest her companion.

Roddy, racking his brain, conscious of a narrower experience, endeavoured suitably to respond, and thus chattering, they came to the end of the furrow.

There she sat down and began to pull off her shoes and stockings.

"I had to wear them in the train, you know," she said, apologetically.

Roddy gazed at his own toes, brown and unshod.

"I suppose you have to in trains," he said, pityingly. Nevertheless he sighed.

"I've never been in one, you see."

As he brought the horses round, she folded the despised garments, laying them neatly under a tuft of wiry prairie grass.

Devoid of unnecessary finery, she became even more companionable, and Roddy's heart went out to her.

Already, against the uninteresting background of his girlish acquaintance, she was becoming pleasantly distinct.

More human than they, Roddy could not but feel that she had a tact and culture unpossessed by any damsel that had so far crossed his path.

Gifted with all the instincts of true comradeship, she had, he felt, a remarkable grasp of the things that were interesting and important.

Comparing their young experiences, the hot hours fled by on wings, bringing hunger and evening and the close of toil with a surprising swiftness.

And when at last they rode home side by side, perched peacefully upon the big mare's back, they journeyed as old friends, who have borne the heat of the day together.

And as they neared the shanty, Roddy was not surprised when his mother, coming out from the door, bade him be acquainted with his aunt, her sister Elizabeth.

He merely wondered a little why the eyes of both were red with recent tears.

V

V

Mary Laville was regarded by her few friends as a woman to be pitied rather than loved.

Though living but two miles from Carroll, she was seldom to be seen in town; the chapel socials knew her not, and, indeed, she seldom left the homestead for any purpose at all.

It was true that the pride which in her earlier Manitoban days had bidden her hide her domestic sorrows, as best she might, had deserted her long since, but the habits engendered by it had grown strong, and remained.

Moreover, working hard, as all western women must, Mary Laville worked harder than most, performing single-handed all the work of her little house, and often enough that of dairy and stable as well.

And it had perhaps been natural that she should grow self-centred and colourless, accepting her present with the patience of custom, regarding the future with a joyless indifference.

It was hard to believe that there had once been a time, and not so distant as to preclude occasional regret, when she and her sister had been the most popular, and indeed, as folk said,

the prettiest pair of girls in the little Ontario town by the great river. It was hard, too, to believe that she had once been fond of singing, had been able to dance, had met the days light-heartedly, looking life in the face with glad eyes, finding it good. It was in those vanished, hardly-believable days, that Henry Laville, bitter from his father's home, had sought comfort in her youth and freshness, winning her with his well-bred English manners and unaccustomed deference.

The joy had fled so quickly from their married life that it now seemed almost an eternity since the brief wooing with all its mystery and triumph, and it was fortunate perhaps that work, as a rule, forbade reminiscence, and that to her tired sleep dreams came but rarely. And, after all, she had much to be thankful for. She had enough to eat, for instance, and Henry Laville had not treated her with any marked unkindness, nor ever with personal violence.

And she could not but be grateful. Moreover, she had been vouchsafed a son, Roddy, loved with a passionate unwanted love, sorrowed over with a continual sorrow. For to Mary Laville, brought up in the strictest puritanism of a Methodist Ontario household, it was only too apparent that the devil was fast claiming Roddy as his own.

And Roddy himself, adoring his father, regarded her rather as an important accessory to home and comfort than an object upon which to bestow his youthful devotion, listening gravely to her querulous remonstrances, glad they were becoming rarer, recognizing not at all that they were love's disguise.

But again, as she frequently told herself, Roddy was in many ways a good son, not unwilling to work when necessity demanded it, and wonderfully ready with his hands. It was true that certain dreams had faded from her sky, beautiful, tender dreams, nursed modestly in those far-off days—but then, girls have such foolish dreams.

Thus Mary Laville, seated on a golden afternoon of June, sewing up a tattered shirt for Roddy's future use.

Ah! poor patched garments of mankind, worn so carelessly, and so oftentimes love's purest monument.

It was an ardent, glorious afternoon, and the great sun, westering slowly over the plains, had flooded the world with its splendour.

There came a knock on the door, and opening it, she faced two travellers.

The little girl looked at her with frank curiosity, but the woman returned her gaze with a heightened colour and shrinking eyes.

For a minute there was silence between them; then:

"Mary!"

"Elizabeth!"

Despite tradition, such meetings after many years are usually unemotional enough, but today the occurrence fell in strangely with her mood, finding her with her thoughts already in the past.

And here, as its ghost, stood her sister, her sister whom the years had wrapped in silence, since she had fallen away from grace and faced the world alone.

Mary could remember the old stern eyes that had never relented, the lips that had never breathed forgiveness. And yet, was this indeed her sister, this frail, time-stricken creature, standing before her, wan and unbeautiful in a blazing irony of sunshine?

Nor will any subsequent history reveal the verdict of those unknown years more truly than this first shock of altered personality.

Perhaps the other read this in her sister's gaze, for her own fell, resting upon the little girl.

"This is Hope," she stammered.

"Hope? Ah, I did not know!" Mary stooped swiftly, kissing the child's forehead. Then she held out both hands to her sister.

"Come in and rest," she said.

The shadows in the little kitchen would be kinder than the light of day. Presently Hope crept out into the sunshine, but the women, looking at one another, sat for a while in silence —memory, insistent, inarticulate, beating at the heart of each.

And hark! Was not that the note of an axe, echoing home across the clearing?

And was not this the sound of dancing feet upon the school-house floor, the clatter of a crazy piano, ringing out across the snow?

And who are these, bright-eyed, triumphant, whispering girl secrets in the candlelight?

"You are not looking well, Elizabeth."

"No; I am not very well."

"You must be tired. Have you travelled far?"

"From Winnipeg to-day."

"I'll get you some tea right now."

"Thank you."

Mary busied herself about the stove.

"We passed your Roddy ploughin'."

"Ah!"

"He—he's a bonny lad, Mary."

"Yes, he's strong."

"You—must be happy, Mary."

"Yes—you'll eat somethin'?"

And they had tea together.

Presently:

"I'm glad you've come at last, Lizzie. I should not have liked—it is nice to see you again—you——"

But the other had bent her head upon her arms, and with her tears the barriers broke down.

And, "Mary," she said, and "Oh, Mary!" In the waning light, low-voiced upon the prairie's stillness, they told their stories; the one colourless, uneventful, disappointed; the other probing deeper into tragedy, a history of long unrest, for, dominated by an hour's sin, Elizabeth's life had been a continual wandering, dogged by the discovery, which her honesty dared not deny, spelling to her puritan nature a perpetual condemnation.

And as most seek happiness, so she with all her soul had sought obscurity. Then it was that Mary Laville learned that her sister had but come west to die. Would Mary forgive her, but indeed she had not been able to bear the thought of Hope alone with strangers and with no other birthright than its shame?

Then the children, riding together and talking eagerly, came homewards down the trail, and the sound of their voices falling upon the silence threaded it with laughter.

VI

VI

"THANK heaven," said Charlie, throwing back his aching shoulders and surveying the broken saw with unmitigated relief. It was the third that had snapped in his unskilled hands during the fortnight past, and he knew that there were no more.

"Thank heaven," he observed again, for never had slower hours swung by on the wheel of time than those of the last two weeks; and though from dawn to dusk the bucksaw had perforce whined its sorrowful way through endless lengths of monotonous green poplar, yet the woodpile behind him did not seem appreciably the smaller for his efforts. Now, at any rate, there would be respite. Day after day with envious eyes he had watched the others whistling contentedly, taking out their various teams to plough or fallow, far from this hot yard with all its smells and sawdust and abominable slavery.

He felt that it would be good work out there with the horses, good telling work, that would bear its obvious fruit in future crops; but this, this was merely the mechanical labour of veriest slavery.

Yet he had stuck to it obstinately, with tired muscles, forcing his saw through the tough wood, its strong, disheartening odour charging the hot air, reeking offensively in his nostrils.

Moreover, the sense of novelty that had made his first few days tolerable was wearing away, leaving in its place a growing feeling of inferiority; for surely he was but the merest menial in this household, the chore-boy, to whom all distasteful tasks were relegated as a matter of course, the Englishman, despised as a greenhorn and of no account.

The shyness, too, with which the younger ones had at first regarded him had quickly evaporated, and was now being replaced by a continual banter that was growingly hard to bear. Even the barefooted girl, offering once with brown hands to guide his saw, had hardly held back her smile at his refusal, watching him carelessly from the open door as he held clumsily to his task. And remembering it now, he was fiercely glad, since all three blades were at last beyond repair.

It was nearing supper-time, and he resolved, despite Canadian traditions, to take some well-earned rest, leaning contentedly against the stack of wood, watching the prairie with lazy eyes.

The day had been hot beyond comparison and very still.

On the southern horizon trembled a mirage of distant trees, faint and unreal, at the rim of the sky.

Far down the trail the youngest boy was driving home the cows from pasture; and watching him his eyelids grew heavy with sleep.

"Had good dreams?"

He woke with a start, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

Two of the boys, home from ploughing, were looking at him seriously. Their ages pivoted on sixteen, and the one was resting his arm upon his brother's shoulder.

"Had good dreams?" they asked again.

Charlie coloured, more at the tone than the question.

"What's that matter to you?" he said.

They smiled.

"Like sleepin' under a wood-pile?" asked one.

"My, that's a great bit o' sawin' you done since noon!" said the other.

Charlie was on his feet now. He was taller than they, but they stood easily, fronting him with smiling lips.

"An' broke the saw again, too," said one; and, "You're too strong for that job, I guess," added his brother.

"Nice weather fer sleepin' out?"

"Min' you don't take cold after sweatin' so much."

The little herd boy, back from the corral, had come up and stood now with laughing eyes looking from Charlie to his brothers. They were hidden from the house, and the old man and Jack had already gone in to supper.

"Has he broken it again?" asked the youngster, but his brothers, without noticing him, kept their eyes upon Charlie.

"My, you're a wonderful feller to get through the work!" they said. "Sawed up a cord o' wood this week, I reckon?"

Charlie listened to them with glowing cheeks, his heart a storm within him, for had he not worked until he was ready to drop with weariness, holding his aching muscles to their task in an honest endeavour to do a good day's work?

It was hard to be scoffed at even by boys.

"Done much sawin' in the old country, or on'y sleepin'?"

Then he stepped up to them.

"You damned young cads," he said, striking the elder upon the lips. The boy flushed, pushing aside his brother's arm. But he was still smiling.

"My, you're gettin' mad now!" he said slowly, and Charlie struck him again with the back of

his hand, confident in his English training, and in his eagerness to repay the indignities of this bitter fortnight all possible consequences became nothing to him. But at the end of a minute he had not inflicted the punishment he thought, and his muscles, tired already, were not obeying him swiftly. Moreover, this boy, younger than he, but prairie-bred, was breathing as quietly as ever, his brown cheeks cool, and his eyes, grown sterner since the laughter left them, showing a capacity for infinite endurance. Charlie grew wilder and more uneasy, his breath coming in hoarse pants, until the old man, rounding the corner, broke angrily upon their fight.

The boy, dropping his hands, looked dumbly at his father, but Charlie turned to him with quick sentences.

"Look here," he said "I've had enough of this cursed sawing and insolence. I didn't come out here to be anybody's nigger, and I'm not going to do any damned Canadian's dirty work."

The old man, self-complacent and unaccustomed to rebuke, turned purple with anger. Then:

"Look here, young man," he spluttered, "there's two things I don't allow on this farm—swearin's one of them an' laziness is the other. An' if you can't put in a good day's work at the

end o' a fortnight without breakin' things, I guess you'd better quit. An' I tell you I'm not goin' to have any o' this fightin' nonsense. This here's a farm, not a circus wantin' clowns. If you want to fight anybody, fight me, see? I'd knock your ugly head off pretty quick, see?"

The old man paused, wheeling round and striding back to the house, mistrusting the look in Charlie's eyes, nor wishing indeed to be taken at his word.

Moreover, it was to his interest to keep him over harvest, and already his shrewder instincts were outmastering his temper. He looked back over his shoulder sulkily.

"You'd better come in to supper," he said.

But Charlie with white lips brushed past him into the house, ignoring the curious eyes of the others, and going straight to the bedroom where his box lay. This he locked, after flinging into it a few odd garments which had been strewn upon the floor. Then he took his coat and came back into the kitchen. The others were waiting at table, and the old man spoke a sonorous grace.

When he had finished, Charlie turned to him.

"I guess I'll quit," he said.

The old man looked up with his mouth full.

"Sit right down," he grunted. But Charlie flung out of the door upon the darkening trail,

stepping blindly and knowing not at all in which direction he should go. That he had left these ill-bred Canadians with their satire and slavery was sufficient for the moment.

He passed the buildings, holding westward into the dying sunlight.

"Charlie!"

He stopped, turning round upon the trail, and saw the old woman, bareheaded, with her kind, keen eyes.

"Don't go, Charlie," she said, laying her hand on his arm. "I know it's hard. But it's the mill that we've all been through. An' you mustn't take the old man at his word. He's often this way, an' he means it no more than anythin', an' the boys are wantin' you to stay, an' we like you, Charlie, an' it'll soon be all right again. An' we know you're a good worker. An' I've cooked some hot biscuits fer your supper, an' you're goin' away without tastin' them. An' where'll you go, an' how'll you know whether they're good folk who take you on, who'll pay you your wages an' treat you fair?"

But Charlie shook his head.

"I'm not going back after that," he said.

She pleaded again, but he was obstinate.

"It's good of you, Mrs. Luke; but I'm going to stick to what I said."

Then:

"See," she said sorrowfully, "I've got some biscuits for you. You must eat somethin'."

He thrust them in his pocket.

"Good-bye, and thank you," he said.

"Good-bye."

She watched him down the trail, and the tears were not far from her eyes, for she, too, had built her castles in the air and seen them tumble sadly about her ears, and her mother instinct guessed at his tumbled dreams.

But Charlie, taking the unknown trail, felt a strange exhilaration, since now at last he had taken life with both hands and for the first time was master of his footsteps; for thus far all his ways had been planned by others—his schooling, his holidays, his future, even the farmer to whose care he had been intrusted.

But now he was facing the world alone, and the bitterness of the day, with its sweat and scorn, grew fainter as he held out across the plains.

And it was wonderful to be walking thus in a new and unknown land with one's future in one's own keeping.

But presently the loneliness of the night creeping upon him changed his mood, and he began to wonder what the future might hold. He grew hungry, and remembering the biscuits ate them gladly, thinking gratefully of Mrs.

Luke, even regretting a little that he had left her motherliness behind him. And the boys, with all their banter, had not treated him so badly after all, showing him many things, and always paying fitting deference to his education, an asset that had seemed small enough to him, but in their eyes was unattainable and golden. He grew a little ashamed of his temper, that, after all, had been mainly the offspring of his own clumsiness and lack of patience. Away on the right he could see a light blinking redly in the dusk, and thought at first that he would make towards it, but remembering certain rumours decided to avoid it, holding further into the unknown.

And as he strode, already tired from a long day's toil, the stillness of the night became more oppressive, lying about him almost like a threat.

And then it was that a sigh, infinitely faint, floated to his ears.

He looked round a little startled, but in the darkness could see nothing save that in front of him some stars that a few moments ago had been blazing brightly, were now blocked from his sight.

He quickened his pace, comforting himself with the assurance that the trail must in time lead to some dwelling-place where prairie hospitality would be surely extended to him.

And again a sigh, a little more distinct, reaching him a little more definitely from a point far down the trail.

The faintest puff of wind brushed his cheek. It was warm, and died suddenly away.

The emptiness of the plains struck into his spirit, filling him with a strange unquiet, and to-night they presented a new front to his experience, with a menace of coming cruelty.

The darkness grew hotter, and when again the wind, coming fitfully down the trail, touched his face, it might have been the breath of a furnace.

And then it was that his frightened eyes, searching the night, encountered a cloud, long and low and shaped like a torpedo.

He had never seen so sinister a cloud, nor one that frowned so cruelly near the earth, and the fear of it gripped his heart.

He remembered stories of tornadoes, and wondered if this could be one. He had heard of them in Dakota, across the border, but never here in Manitoba. Was this to be the first, and he its victim? And then the storm broke very suddenly.

He put up his hands to shelter his eyes and face from the stones, and they beat him down, drumming on his back and shoulders. He crouched upon the trail wet and fearful and

thrashed like a dog. And in the thunder of the tempest the clatter of Jack Carson's waggon was but the whisper of a child.

Yet he came with a loose rein and hail-spurred horses, his empty waggon-box bumping perilously, swinging from side to side, taking the trail at topmost speed.

Suddenly the horses pulled out upon the grass, plunging wildly, and Carson dragging them back into the teeth of the storm cursed at their delay, but knowing them well stared harder into the darkness. And in the middle of the trail a figure, huddled and beaten, caught his eye, and leaning from his seat he shouted to it to climb up. Charlie with cramped limbs clambered blindly into the waggon. Carson threw him some empty sacks, bidding him cover himself as best he might, and held his horses against the storm for another half hour. Then at last, swinging among some buildings, a sudden glow of light, from a door just opened, streamed out upon the trail, and leaning back upon the reins he pulled up hard.

"Thank the Lord," he observed piously, and climbed down beside the horses. Framed in the doorway, his wife, slender and girlish, stood holding a lantern above her head, peering out through the hail.

Carson was unfastening the traces, when sud-

denly remembering his passenger he shouted up at him:

"Hurrah, man!" he said. "Get in and warm yourself!"

Charlie, faint and half-frozen, stumbled out and came round to help him.

"Let me give you a hand," he stammered, but Carson, taking the lantern from his wife, swung it round against his white face, looking at him keenly.

"That's all right," he said. "Glad you're an Englishman. Get inside and warm yourself. Girlie, here's somebody for you to look after, and give him a smile of whiskey."

It was the first time in this new land that English voices had sounded in his ears, and Charlie entered the shanty with a grateful heart.

"And you are wet through. I must get you some of Jack's things."

The voice was tender and well-bred, and almost brought tears to his eyes.

He drank up the whiskey and water and looked at her eagerly. Her English refinement was abundantly apparent though she was roughly clad, with bare arms, busy about supper.

Presently Jack, wet and swarthy, came in from the stables, brushing the rain from his moustache, and bending down to kiss his wife.

"Got him some togs, girlie?"

"Yes."

"Good, and now we'll have some grub and make a man of him. Just out, eh?"

Charlie nodded.

"A fortnight ago," he said, and told them his story.

Jack looked at his wife quizzically.

"We're not over rich," he said. "But I'll give you eight dollars a month till you're worth more if you care to take it on. I'm wanting a man for haying and harvest."

And Charlie with great content closed gladly with his offer.

Next day the sun smiled out of a cloudless sky upon a prairie golden and glistening, and, to Charlie, filled with the brightest promise. As he stood at the shanty door drinking in something of its purity, the scenes of yesterday seemed but a nightmare past, and indeed his own aching limbs were surely the only witnesses to its reality. But Carson, coming up from the buildings, stood for a moment with shaded eyes looking out over the prairie.

"See that fellow ploughing there?" he asked presently.

Charlie nodded.

"That's wheat, killed to death by the hail last night, and he's ploughing it under. Last year he had his crops frozen, and two years ago they

were burnt in stook. This'll finish him, I guess, poor devil."

So the night had held its tragedy, after all.

"But you've escaped?"

Jack nodded grimly.

"Contrary to my usual luck, yes," he said.

And they went in to breakfast.

Afterwards, as they settled future plans, he crossed over to the cupboard, lifting down a brown demijohn of whiskey.

"Have a smile for luck," he said.

For a moment Charlie wavered, the ghost of a promise, given in the Berkshire rectory, flitting spectrally before his mind.

Then he threw back his head. Had he not taken the world for himself and found it good?

"Thanks," he said, drinking to future happiness, and with never a thought for all the hundred thousand hopes that had withered in the shadow of a demijohn.

VII

VII

Into the blue waters of Silver Lake Roddy splashed contentedly, his shirt and knickers limp and damp with the sweat of toil lying crumpled on the white sand behind him.

Touched by the faintest ripple, whispering and crystal, the lake stretched for some two hundred acres to a farther bank of stunted bush.

Hidden among the trees stood Blackett's shanty, and above it, on this harvest afternoon, a blue wisp of smoke hung lazily on the hot air. Even to Roddy, nonchalant and accustomed to its beauty, the lake, set like a jewel in a dip of the brown prairies, seemed lovelier than ever, and a consciousness of work well done lent it an added lustre; for Henry Laville, working many hours a day, had cut his eighty-acre patch of wheat since the beginning of the week, and Roddy, stooking from dawn till dusk, even with Hope to help him, had found it hard to keep pace with the binder.

Now it was over, and the stubble lay bare and gleaming, dotted with the white stooks, waiting for stacking-time. And at the end of it Roddy with his dusty skin had yearned suddenly for

Silver Lake, two miles from home upon the southward trail.

The water at the margin was cold, but out in the middle, unsheltered from the sun since dawn, it spread a basking surface, warm and delicious.

Roddy swam leisurely out into the lake with peaceful strokes, until finding a place after his own heart he rolled over on his back, floating with arms outstretched, staring up into the great blue dome above him, unflecked by the lightest cloud.

He could feel the sun tanning his chest and cheeks, and the waters drumming pleasantly in his ears. And Blackett, smoking a pipe in the shadow of his doorway, watched him with a smile. He seemed so well content with life.

Presently, shaking the water out of his ears, his round head bobbed up above the surface, and doing so a figure upon the bank seemed to have caught his eye.

"Roddy," it called. "Roddy."

He swam toward the shore, wondering that Hope, whom he had left at home helping to make the butter, with unwilling hands, had followed him so quickly.

As he drew nearer, he could see her eyes watching him wistfully. And she had clasped her hands.

"Oh, Roddy!" she said. "I've run away—an' do you think—do you think I might come in?"

He hung back, treading the water, looking at her in some amazement. It had not occurred to him that she would want to bathe, nor in a rapid survey of the surrounding families could he remember that any of their daughters had been known to swim in Silver Lake. Then:

"Can you swim?" he asked dubiously.

She looked at him with shining eyes. Swim? How many months had she lived among the lakes and rivers of the great woods that he should ask her such a question.

"It's rather deep, you know," he added, and holding an arm above his head dropped beneath the surface to demonstrate his words. But when he appeared again her smile was contemptuous.

"I don't care if it's ten miles deep," she said, and Roddy capitulated.

"All right," he assented. "On'y don't get drowned, you know."

He lay back, kicking the water, looking at her curiously through a shower of golden spray; and she stood now upon an overhanging piece of the bank, poised and radiant, her feet half hidden in the brown grass, her dark hair clustered closely about her head. He could see the

lines on her neck and below her knees that marked the border of the sun-brown.

And watching her dispassionately, he wondered a little at her strength and daintiness, surprised at never having guessed it, half concious that she filled him with a sudden new satisfaction. Then she stood a moment in the sun and then lifted her arms, laughing at him as he trod the water, and in a moment, arrowy and noiseless, had dived into the lake below.

And when she came up beside him, shaking the water from her eyes, her cheeks flushed at his obvious admiration.

"I say, you *can* dive," he said, enviously. "Where did you learn? I can't dive a bit."

She told him a little breathlessly that the men in Big Tree Camp had taught her, when she was little, from some rocks above a pool in the woods.

And presently Roddy clambered out in a clumsy effort to follow her example, and the splash of his entry mingled with her laughter.

"I can't do it a bit," he said ruefully, looking down at his chest, stung pink by the shock of his contact with the water.

She encouraged him.

"Never mind, you will some day, I guess, if you on'y stick to it."

"I say, this is better'n stookin'."

"Better'n anythin' I think, don't you?"

Roddy nodded, taking a long breath and letting himself slip down into the blue depths through which the gravel shone white and clear.

But when he came up, blown and gasping, Hope, too, had vanished, disappearing for so long that at last he grew almost frightened, until out in the middle she rose up in the sunlight, laughing at his wonder.

Roddy's sense of superiority received a second blow.

It was his turn to look wistful, and, "I wish I could do that," he said.

But, "never mind," she answered again. "You can do lots o' things I can't do. You can ride, an' your stooks don't tumble down, an' you can lift a bag o' wheat, an' chop wood."

Roddy grew more complacent.

"I guess it's on'y practice I want," he observed.

And so the afternoon wore away, fled away, as the best of hours always fly, even in youth.

And surely it must be some primal instinct, conquering the centuries, some lingering memory of the world's remotest youth, that leads the eternal child in us to river and lake and sea for its most untrammelled joy.

Blackett at his shanty door called Charlie to his side, pointing to the children in the lake.

"That's a pretty picture, don't you think?"

The other, shading his eyes, looked at them smilingly.

"By Jove," he said, "I know the boy. He's Roddy—Roddy something. I met him the day I came. And that's his sister?"

But Blackett shook his head.

"I fancy not," he said. "Some cousin or relation, I think, who has just come out to live with them. Fancy choosing Laville's for a visit. Gad, it's a curious notion. But Roddy is first-rate."

He stood up, framing his hands about his mouth, and his strong cooee floated down to the children dressing on the sand.

Roddy waved his hand, and, seeing Blackett beckon, turned to Hope.

"I guess he'll give us supper," he said. As they climbed the trail to the shanty, with buoyant steps and cool brown skins, Roddy's quick ears caught some words from Charlie's lips. They filled him with a certain pride of possession.

"By Jove, that's a pretty child," he heard him say, and saw that his eyes were held by her beauty.

VIII

VIII

PARTLY by reason of his married state and partly on account of a jaundiced and battered piano in his lean-to parlour, it fell to Jack Carson's lot to be the chiefest Sunday host among the scattered Englishmen of the settlement. And his shanty for the greater part of the day was consequently well filled with guests.

And thus, too, it came about that when after breakfast on a certain November Sabbath Blackett stood at his door and wondered how he should spend the day, Jack Carson's parlour rose naturally before his eyes.

Turning back into his shanty he donned his fur cap, and pulling on a pair of buckskin moccasins set out across the plain.

Spread out before his eyes it lay on this winter morning, a silver sea, radiant and glistening; and on the horizon, clear-cut, the hills of fifty miles away might have been the goal of a morning's walk.

To the north lay Carroll, with the sunlight on its whitewashed houses, and beyond it the snow-clad sand-hills of the Assineboine.

The Manitoban

The low sun swung frostily in the southern sky, with gleaming sun-dogs on its either side, and the clean air thrilled with an icy purity.

The thermometer, hovering some thirty degrees below zero, suggested a deeper cold to come, and the least breath of wind cut like a knife.

He crossed Silver Lake, with its four-foot covering of ice, and held on down the trail, striding swiftly, sucking at his pipe, with an eye for the promise of next week's weather.

A silent man, more prosperous than most, Blackett stood for a type of Englishman that in this part of Manitoba, at any rate, was rare—a man who in his ten years' sojourn had learned the last thing in western farming, and, eschewing the lighter side of life, was building up his bank account and adding to his acres. He lived alone, and was reported to be capable of doing the work of two ordinary men.

And as a consequence, by a light-hearted and usually bankrupt community of his fellow-countrymen, he was looked upon as an abnormal and even morose companion. Nevertheless on this Sunday morning his appearance at Carson's doorway was greeted with an uproarious welcome from some half dozen long-limbed bachelors sprawling in the little parlour, filling it with a chorus, roaring gaily and in unison.

The song broke down in cheers and laughter.

"Hallo, Black, old man!"

"Here's old Crœsus!"

"How's the work going?"

"Why aren't you cutting wood?"

"Lost your way?"

"Feelin' bad, old man, so's you can't work?"

Blackett received the fire of criticism and query with a smile, and, bowing to Mrs. Carson, subsided into a seat. Jack, at the piano, turned round in his shirt-sleeves, and, "Sing us the song, Black," he said.

And there followed a great cheering, for Blackett was the proud possessor and sole performer of a certain lugubrious melody, that, dealing with babies and angels and death, was delivered by him with a robust and pleasing pathos. Blackett cleared his throat, and to Jack's accompaniment proceeded to unburden himself of his tragedy, punctuated by roars of laughter and the tramp of feet, marking time to the music.

At the end, sinking gravely back into his chair, he resumed his pipe, relapsing into silence, glancing round at the assembly for the first time. And a strange and rather battered little community it was, recruited from various lonely shanties, gathered here in Jack's parlour and wrapped about by the greatness of the plains—

men, who had grown proof against disappointment and content with hardship, hiding with an instinctive unselfishness their several difficulties, looking out upon life light-heartedly enough. Social barriers would have held them worlds apart at home, but here, face to face with the selfsame problems, beset by the same dangers, they were one in a commonwealth of toil. And thus Jack of Harrow and Cambridge was even now playing an accompaniment for Mike Malone, erstwhile chandler's clerk of Cork, in the county of Cork, and he, Blackett, the son of a country doctor, was sitting cheek by jowl with Tom Roper, a tram-conductor from Birmingham, but a good fellow, with a gift for story-telling; and Charlie West, recently from a Berkshire rectory, still bearing the public-school stamp upon him, was sharing the sofa with Lantern, who had been everything, from a newspaper boy to a cook on a steam-trawler.

And poverty—how poor they were, how absolutely dependent on each year's crop for the maintenance of home and independence.

And glamour—how long ago it had fled away before the stern realities of mortgaged land and frozen wheat, debts, and folly, and bad luck.

And yet what of that?

They had life and strength, and being for the

most part young, a certain belief in to-morrow —they had sound lungs and big chests, and there was still a tune to be battered out of Jack's careworn piano.

And "chorus, gentlemen, chorus!" cried Jack —had he forgotten the duns in his trousers' pocket, or that wheat was only fifty cents?—Not at all—but what of that?

To-day was Sunday, and it was fine. On the table in the kitchen there would presently be enough for them all to eat, even if it were only pork—and to-day there was to be a pudding.

So "chorus, gentlemen, chorus," and the little parlour rang again.

And "By Jove, that's good!" said some one. "Knock's spots out of old Black's funeral march, eh?" And then Malone, carolling in a rich tenor voice, strayed off into an old Irish melody, wild and haunting, and not far away from tears. Blackett, with a half turn, caught himself watching Charlie with a smile. And for the life of him Charlie, staring out of the little window, could only see an English garden, with its dear stiff rows of gaudy flowers, could only hear a young voice singing this same song, while the rain of a windy shower thrummed fitfully upon the window. At the close of the song the picture vanished suddenly—and there again were

the white plains, frozen, empty, immeasurable, and here were Jack and Tom and the rest in the little lean-to parlour.

Half ashamed, he looked furtively round. Had the others also trodden the fields of memory? He caught Blackett's gaze, grave now and understanding seemingly, but the others were inscrutable. And then there was silence for a while, broken presently by a soberer conversation, during which Lucy Carson slipped out to set the midday meal.

At last it grew time to troop out and bear a hand in feeding Jack's stock for noon, lingering in the warm, sod-roofed stables to look at his new driver, his "blood," as he called her, bought last year, and, with wheat at fifty cents, not likely to be paid for until next.

In the yard, lop-sided and ridiculous, stood a broken binder, bought long since and paid for by instalments to a company who charged a twenty-per-cent. interest for their accommodation. Jack laughed a little bitterly as he looked at it. He had already paid twice its value, and still owing some arrears of interest had had his best stack of wheat seized this harvest by the sheriff. Moreover, the binder, long ago useless, had perforce been replaced by another, else had his crops remained uncut. Poor Jack, no wonder he had learned the art of avoiding creditors

and every legal shuffle that forbade the payment of debt.

Mrs. Carson came to the door, calling that dinner was ready, and, returning, the little party gathered round the table. And a well-filled table it was, spread with a real cloth, making some of the assembly a little shy.

And it was good to mark a certain girlish pride with which Lucy Carson surveyed her finished preparations and her guests' obvious satisfaction; good, too, to notice her smile, for, already, the only Englishwoman in many miles, hemmed in by work, and a partner in all Jack's ceaseless difficulties, the lines about her mouth and eyes had grown deeper than her youth and beauty warranted. And yet, the bride of so unaccustomed a poverty, it would have been small wonder if something of her disillusionment had not crept into her eyes. And could love indeed and all the homage of these little gatherings be expected to suffice her for the monotony of this prairie life?

The talk at table was dominated by the price of wheat, the interest on debts for machinery, the foreclosing of mortgages, the successful defeat of sheriffs. And only Blackett and Charlie, sitting next to Mrs. Carson and noticing her silence, tried to turn the conversation

upon new books and the magazines from home.

After dinner the pictures were passed round —scenes of empire, scenes of Bond street, scenes of old-country sport, crammed with memory and contrast and tradition—devoured eagerly, discussed with a flattering attention that was probably seldom paid to them at home.

And then once more to song and chorus and tobacco, while the short afternoon sped by.

Presently, in an interval between songs, the sound of sleigh-bells fell upon their ears, and Jack went to the door, and when he turned back—

"It's Henry Laville," he said.

He drove up to the door—big, blonde, and suspiciously cheerful, very talkative, and brimming with good temper.

No, he would not stay; had to get on home, been driving since noon. No, he had not started drawing wood yet, was thinking of buying it or getting in Souris coal. Yes, it was very sad about his wife's sister, but the end had not come sooner than had been expected.

Roddy was spending most of his time sawing wood in Carroll. His wife was well. He grinned genially. Would the boys have a smile? In the back of the cutter he had some rye whis-

key. Yes, it was good stuff, as good as rye could be, that was to say.

The others, crowding round, drank his health, only Blackett abstaining. Then Laville, changing his mind, said he would come in and have a warm. He hitched his horse up to the well-post, throwing his buffalo robe over its back.

He came into the kitchen, shaking hands with Mrs. Carson, and asking for a song. He was cold, he said, and took another pull of whiskey. The others, winking at one another, got up a chorus in which he presently joined with a huge voice, beating time with his fist upon the kitchen table. And then suddenly in a swift change of mood he turned to Jack.

"What do you want those bounders for?" he asked pointedly, looking at Roper and Malone. "Eh? Why do you ask a man to come in here with them, eh? By gad, I won't stand it!"

There was an awkward silence, broken by Blackett, who, falling into talk with Malone, saved the situation. Henry Laville got up on his feet, towering in the little shanty.

"Give us a song, Mrs. Carson," he said.

But Lucy shook her head.

"I never sing, Mr. Laville," she replied, and tried to smile. Suddenly he stumbled towards her with open arms in an endeavour to kiss her cheek, but Jack, springing up, pushed him

back, and he sank down into his chair, apparently sobered.

"Awf'ly sorry," he said. "Awf'ly sorry, Mrs. Carson; f'got myself, you know."

Then his glance wandering round fell on Roper.

"Good old Roper," he said, holding out his hand. "Jolly glad to see you. How's things?"

And at this sudden change of front there was a general laugh, in which Laville broke suddenly, slapping his leg, and rocking himself with wet eyes.

Then Jack caught Blackett's arm.

"I say, we must get him home, you know," he said, and Blackett nodded.

"I'll go along with him right now," he said. Jack looked at him gratefully.

"You're a good 'un, Black," he murmured.

Charlie had been standing by and caught their whispered sentences.

"May I come too?" he asked. "I'd like the drive. I would really."

Blackett nodded.

"Very glad," he said, and they established Laville in his cutter.

As they drove away, Blackett leaned over the back of the seat and feeling for the demijohn jerked it into the snow.

As they entered the little town, in the chill of

dusk, the chapel bell was swinging, and on the wooden sidewalk groups of black-coated worshippers were moving thitherwards at its appeal. Some of them glanced askance at Laville and his escort, and Blackett's lips tightened to a grim smile.

In the middle of the roadway, opposite the station yard, stood a little group of idlers, and among them, with olive cheeks and sloe-black eyes, Pete Lafayette, and suddenly Henry Laville caught sight of him. With a swift movement he snatched the reins from Blackett, pulling the horse up hard, till he foamed on the bit.

"I've got something to say to that blasted half-breed," he mumbled, and staggered over the side of the cutter.

Blackett gave the lines to Charlie and sprang after him.

"Don't be a fool, Laville," he said; but the other, shaking him off, broke into the ring, standing now expectantly, with all their eyes upon him.

Blackett made another attempt to get him back to the cutter; but Laville, holding to his purpose, strode on and faced the half-breed.

What his quarrel was Blackett did not know, but he saw a sudden flame leap up into the other's dusky cheeks, and presently he spat con-

temptuously. Laville thrust out an arm, and Pete, staggering back, rolled over into the snow.

Some men behind him tried to hold him back, and one snatched a clasp-knife from his hand.

But nobody touched Laville, standing unsteadily, a toppling giant with blazing eyes.

With clenched fists Pete rushed at him again, breaking from his friends, but a second time the great fist, thrust easily forwards, caught him full in the face, and he fell back, spitting blood and teeth, into the trampled snow, and all the devil in him unveiled in his black eyes.

Again Blackett interposed, but remonstrance was worse than useless now, and next moment with hands and feet and teeth Pete was tearing at Laville in a frenzy of passion, his mongrel blood thirsty for slaughter. And the vehemence of his attack had apparently taken the Englishman by surprise, for his blue eyes were growing puzzled, and his big limbs strangely unwieldy; and the others, holding their breath, wondered, for in the annals of Carroll this Henry Laville had been unconquered. What was about to happen?

Even the folk on the sidewalk paused, their eyes held by the spectacle, some chord in their being suddenly awakened in response to these primal passions.

And for a minute the chapel bell, swinging

slowly and without a pause, fell upon ears that were deaf.

And then it came, the unexpected and half guessed. Laville reeled, bewildered, with big fists pushing away empty air, and at last, toppling over with a thud into the snow, lay still and unresisting.

For a moment nobody moved, while Pete, with bleeding lips, knelt above his victim, pounding his face with both fists, spitting into the upturned, wondering eyes. Then the tension snapped suddenly, spontaneously. Pete was pulled back from the spoils of his victory. Blackett stooped over Laville, unconscious, half recognizable, the black-coated group on the sidewalk gripped their Bibles and moved on, and the chapel bell, swinging monotonously, filled the air with its rebuking message.

Presently, with Charlie's help, Blackett lifted Laville into the cutter, and half an hour later they knocked at his shanty door, where Mary, shutting the Bible, met them without emotion.

In the flickering light of an oil lamp the kitchen looked strangely bare and uninviting.

"It is very good of you," she said; "very good of you to have taken so much trouble."

She spoke slowly and with a certain care to pronunciation, which she always observed in addressing her husband's English friends.

"Not at all," they murmured, and carried in the giant, limp and slobbering and blasphemous.

His bed? Yes, it was yonder in the corner. It was warmer, you see, in this very cold weather than the lean-to bedroom. Mrs. Laville spoke apologetically. Hope, half hidden in shadow, looked at them with pale cheeks and wide, frightened eyes.

Blackett was frank.

"There was a fight," he explained, "and your husband has been rather badly mauled, though not seriously I hope."

"No, I don't suppose it is serious. I will bathe his face.

She filled a dipper with warm water from the kettle and, taking down a towel, bent over her husband, wiping the blood from his cheeks, pushing back his hair. Blackett watched her for a minute. Then he turned suddenly to Charlie.

"Let's get out," he muttered.

And they bade her good night.

"Good night," scoffed Blackett as they stepped out into the moonlight. "Good night. Good Lord."

He filled his pipe. Charlie, held dumb by all the changing scenes of this strange Sabbath-day, had the picture in the shanty still before his eyes. Then:

"Is he—dead?" asked a hollow, horror-stricken voice.

They both started, and, Blackett holding up his lighted match, they looked into a pair of questioning blue eyes from which the very light of life seemed suddenly to have been wiped away.

Charlie was struck strangely by the boy's wide-eyed misery, and Blackett, with a quick sympathy, laid a hand on Roddy's shoulder.

To him the whole incident had been merely an unpleasant spectacle, in which he had been obliged to play a certain part, but to Roddy, as he readily guessed, it had meant the downfall of an idol, the wrecking of a lifetime's worship.

"He's all right, Roddy," he said, cheerily. "Don't be afraid. Take a lot more than that to upset your father."

But Roddy refused to be comforted, and they left him at the shanty door with all his father's disgrace heaped upon his shoulders.

IX

IX

In the waning of a January afternoon, where various divergent bush tracks led into the main trail winding northwards, Blackett, with a load of frozen poplars, met old man Luke, who had been drawing out logs for a new granary.

They exchanged greetings, and, their teams taking the trail with the accuracy of custom, the two men, fur-clad and moccasined, tramped in their wake upon the beaten snow.

The old man was inclined to be garrulous, and Blackett, who stood higher in the estimation of the Canadian section of the community than most of his comrades, was a good listener.

Sucking at his pipe, he let the old man talk himself out of the weather and into provincial politics, and out of these into more local matters, where he was something of an authority, and from these into topics religious.

"You know Wesley Jones by name?" he asked.

Blackett shook his head.

"Well, well," the old man was surprised. "He's a comin' man, Blackett, a comin' man. One o' the best preachers in the city o' Winni-

peg till he overdid himself an' had to knock off into a country circuit. I guess I was lucky hearin' of it right off an' gettin' him for us."

"Very," murmured Blackett.

"Oh! he's a powerful feller, an' he's had a rare ministry, a rare ministry, an' he's just the man fer backsliders."

"Is he indeed?"

"You bet. There's a sight o' backsliders in these parts."

"I suppose so."

"That's what—an' mark me, there's goin' to be rare times when Wesley Jones gets among 'em."

The old man chuckled, breaking off to rebuke one of his horses.

"Come out of it, you ol' devil."

Then he turned to Blackett.

"I'm sorry to see so few o' your folk at the school-house Sundays," he said.

Blackett smoked in silence for a minute. Then:

"Different denomination, you see," he murmured.

"No denomination at all—nothin' most of 'em," observed the old man.

Blackett was silent, and the other, scenting disapproval, spoke with a half apology.

"You're different to most of 'em—but you

must see it," he continued. "There's Jack Carson's lot—play tennis on Sunday in the summer. No wonder they get hailed out. Sing songs, godless, worthless songs, in winter. Drink themselves into beasts when they've got the chance. Oh! I know! you call 'em your friends; but isn't that so—isn't that so?"

Blackett remained silent. Then:

"Look at young West," said the old man. "As nice a boy as ever I see, an' even tempered too, mostly—come out from a good home. I've got letters from his mother, an' I met him with Roper an' Carson as drunk as a lord in Carroll two days after they'd got their Christmas mail. An' you know what the end'll be. Look at Malone—look at Roper, an' Brown an' Lanyon, an' all of 'em, good workers an' makin' good wages, an' spendin' it in a week in the fall, an' then writin' home an' runnin' down the country. Bad luck? Course they've had bad luck, but it's them as misuses good luck as gets hit worst when the other sort comes along."

Blackett nodded.

"I'm sorry about Charlie West," he said.

The old man grew lugubrious.

"He'll go the ways o' the rest o' them," he prophesied solemnly. "Same build, same education, same ideas. He'll go the ways o' the rest o' them. Look at Laville. An' they say

since he fought Pete Lafayette that he's not been right wise—never been the same man even when he's sober."

"He did get knocked about a bit," observed Blackett.

"An' look at him, look at his home—with a wife that can't look anybody in the face, an' a godless young ruffian for a son. I guess that's a picture to make a man think some—to make any man think, eh?"

"Roddy's a good sort, all right," murmured Blackett.

"Has been once," observed the old man. "Was in my Bible class once; but he's a backslider, an' slidin' fast at that." The old man sighed.

The leading light of his school-house Sunday school, and perhaps the oldest settler, he regarded the souls of the community as in a sense dependent upon him. At any rate, there was no one better fitted to pronounce an opinion as to their future, or diagnose their present spiritual condition. And if Wesley Jones, B.A., of Winnipeg, should prove to be the means of bringing back these lost sheep, he, old man Luke, would at any rate have some claim to recognition in the transaction.

To Blackett, who had indeed on one or two occasions ventured into the Sunday atmosphere

of the little school-house, this conversation was distasteful enough, although, with a calmer judgment than most of his countrymen meted out to the prevailing Methodism, he had been quick to recognize elements in it that made for good. And the old man's complacent disposal of the eternal verities afforded him material for reflection when their ways diverged.

Tramping alone in the dark behind his horses his mind went back over his companion's declamation, and he could not but acknowledge the truth that lay in it.

Regarded as comrades, good fellows, generous, easygoing, and ready for enjoyment, how infinitely more companionable were his countrymen than these creed-bound Canadians, with their tenacity for work and money, their remorseless bargains, their appalling classification of their fellow men into the saved and damned.

And yet again, regarded as settlers, as the makers of a new country, the sponsors for what Manitoba, in years to come, was to represent to humanity—which of these were doing the best by the land of their adoption?

He looked round upon the settlement as he knew it. Who had the best farms, the biggest buildings, the finest wheat? Were they not these Canadians, starting for the most part with no capital but an inherited hardiness, a capacity

for endurance, traditionless all, save for the roughest of parental upbringing, and the most bigoted of religious instruction? Yes, it seemed a pity that there could not be a mean between the two. He supposed that there must be in some parts; but here in Carroll it was plain for all to see. To be English stood for debt and drink, gentlemanly manners, and general inefficiency. To be Canadian stood probably for a balance at the bank, a seat in the Bible class, and a reputation for hard work and the best side of bargains.

Well, it was a pity; but what was the use of complaining?

And the great night, cold and silent and immense, offered no key to the difficulty.

Above him, crowded and brilliant, blazed a million stars, and at his feet, growing grey into the darkness, stretched a world of snow. On the farthest horizon trembled the northern lights —delicate, impalpable, a ribbon of faintest red. As he crossed the lake to the shanty, a wolf, somewhere in the bush, cried suddenly, voicing all the loneliness of the night, and the heavy breathing of his horses seemed the friendlier by contrast. Taking the reins he urged them up the steep path to the stable yard, glad to be home, glad to force these problems from his mind by tasks that lay obvious to his hand.

Groping for the lantern, he lit it and led his team, their long coats powdered with frost, into the warm air of the stables, and the two mares left at home whinnied a welcome. Then holding the light above his head he saw suddenly that their racks were filled with hay and the stables newly bedded.

"That's odd, by Jove!" he muttered, and stepping out looked across at the shanty.

And sure enough there was a light in the window. He could see the glow of it falling on the snow beyond. And when at last he shut the stable door and came up to the house, the smell of frying pork came valorously down the breeze.

"Very good of somebody," he murmured, and opening the door found Roddy bent over the stove.

"An', I say, you do keep your things in a mess," he said. "There's both sides o' your plates been dirty for a week, I guess, an' you haven't scraped out your porridge pot for about a month."

Blackett laughed. "Never bother about that sort of thing. Life's not long enough, you know."

"Well I guess you're just about slack."

Roddy looked at him reprovingly.

"It's very good of you to have done up the chores, Roddy."

"That's all right. I liked it, an' supper'll be ready. Time you've got washed."

Blackett sank into a chair.

"You'd be tempting me into taking a wife, Roddy," he smiled. "A wife, by Jove. It looks so good to see it all waiting for one like this without any trouble.

Roddy turned the pork.

"Well, there's Mabel Jones, an' Loo Corrie, an' Becca Luke. Fine smart girls too," he said.

But Blackett shook his head.

"Oh, Roddy, you don't understand," he murmured.

They pulled up chairs and fell upon the supper, Roddy suddenly growing silent.

Blackett watched him curiously, wondering why he had come, but forbearing to ask him. Afterward, pulling out his pipe, they drew near the stove.

Blackett smoked quietly.

"Say, Mr. Blackett," said Roddy presently.

"Yes."

"You—you don't *want* a chore boy I guess?"

Blackett puffed away in silence for a minute or two. Then:

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"Cause I'm wantin' a job."

"But they want you at home."

"I—I've left home."

"Left home? But how will they do without you? What about your mother, Roddy?"

"She's all right—I guess I——"

He stopped, whittling at a piece of firewood and staring into the open stove; and Blackett, watching his face with the firelight upon it, saw that the boy was troubled.

"Spit it out, Roddy," he observed.

"Oh, Mr. Blackett," he said. "You remember—remember bringing Henry home." Roddy always called his father by his Christian name. "You remember how Pete beat him?"

Blackett nodded.

"He was drunk, you know—Henry was."

"Yes, I know."

"Pete wouldn't have licked him else."

"No."

"But since then Henry's cowed, fair beat. An' he won't fight Pete again. He's afraid o' him. I've asked him heap o' times, but he on'y stares an' shakes his head. An' when he's in town he won't look at him, but dodges him. An' everybody knows—an' they laugh. An' the boys laugh, though I've beaten 'em all—every one. But they know father's beat, an' the men know—everyone knows—an' they're laughin' at him all the while. An' I—I can't stick it. I'm goin' to quit, Mr. Blackett."

"But your mother, Roddy?"

"Oh, she's all right. Henry's not in town now a bit hardly; stays right home. It's awful. Say, will you take me on?"

Blackett shook his head.

"No, Roddy, I won't. You ought to go home and stick it. Right thing to do, you know. 'Tis really."

But Roddy shook his head.

"I've stuck it more'n two months now, an' I've made up my mind to quit. I'm past fifteen an' I can get work anywhere."

Blackett said no more, but when Roddy asked him once again remained obdurate, although the boy was obviously crestfallen.

"No, Roddy, you're wrong, old chap, and it's no good asking me."

They sat for a while in silence, then suddenly Roddy sprang up and went to the door.

"There's bells on the trail," he said.

They listened and presently the sound grew nearer and more distinct.

"It's the livery bells," said Roddy, with quick ears detecting their distinguishing tone. "It's the livery bells. That's funny, an' at this time o' night."

They stepped out into the frost.

On the greyness of the lake was a blot moving slowly in their direction, and presently

up the trail to the shanty came a cutter, travelling heavily, and hitched apparently to an exhausted horse.

At the doorway it stopped and the occupant climbing out came towards them.

"Thank God!" he said in a deep voice.

"I've never been lost before. It's a terrible feeling to be lost. An' I smashed a runner in a drift, an' I guess the horse is about dead."

"You had better come in and feed," said Blackett, and Roddy led the horse down to the stable.

The newcomer laid aside his furs.

He was a sallow-faced man with gaunt cheeks and big brown eyes.

"You see I'm a stranger here," he said. "A stranger to the West, for the matter of that, save for some years in Winnipeg. My name's Wesley Jones. Oh, God, it's a terrible feeling to be lost, isn't it? An' with such a frost upon the plains too, eh? A man who was lost would soon get frozen, eh?"

Blackett looked at him keenly.

"Oh, I don't know. It's not so easy to get lost as you think. Pretty well settled about here, you know, in these days. You had better have some food."

He ate ravenously, and in silence, until pushing away his plate he bowed his head.

"Oh, God," he said, "Oh, God, who hast brought me out of the night, and guided my feet, I thank Thee. Bless Thou my ministry, and fill my soul with an agony for the lost; ah, the lost, who have no trail; who can see no light upon the plains."

Blackett watched him curiously, but Roddy, whittling still at his stick of wood, gazed at him with some distrust, a little frightened at so obvious an intimacy with the Almighty.

The minister's glance fell upon him.

"Your son?" he asked Blackett.

Roddy laughed.

Then the minister bent towards him and looked into his face.

"You'll be a strong man," he said, plucking his arm, and his big eyes mastered Roddy's gaze. "You'll be a strong man. May your faith be as strong."

But next day, when Roddy shouldering bravely down the winter trail set out into his chosen life, the minister shook his head; for "one never can tell what you Englishmen may become," he said.

And for seven years Roddy came no more to Carroll.

II

THE BOOK OF HIS BIRTHRIGHT

I

I

Life moves slowly on the plains and in seven years the changes in the settlement were but few.

Immigrants entering the country in annual thousands, heralded by newspaper reports, dwindled locally to some half a dozen, and were quickly lost upon the prairie, creating very little difference in the life of the community.

Of the older inhabitants it might be said that for the most part their grooves had but deepened.

Some were a little richer, cutting larger areas of wheat, using better machinery than of old. Others were a little poorer, still hoping in tomorrow.

Some had gone under and disappeared.

Henry Laville after a prolonged illness, resulting, it was supposed, from his fight with Pete and the effects of deep drinking in other days, had died and been buried, and his widow living on in the little shanty had rented the farm to a neighbour.

Then after four years she also had died, but

not before Roddy had written to say that he was coming home, having saved enough money to buy the horses and implements necessary to work the farm.

She would have given much, all that she had indeed, though that was very little, to have seen him again, but comforted herself after her own manner with the thought that at any rate he would be able to live upon the old farm.

So she died with his photograph pressed to her lips, and her love hidden in her bosom; and Hope, left thus alone, was offered a home with the Lukes.

She was to help with the work, and would not receive wages; but considering the distressing circumstances of her birth, would be fortunate in being admitted to a well-conducted and upright home; and old man Luke felt that he had looked upon the matter from its highest standpoint, and thus it came about that on a spring afternoon Young Luke stood looking meditatively at Hope.

She was always prettier, he thought, when she grew angry, and she was angry now.

Since Jack went away and got married, Young had been the chief man upon the farm, and in his father's absence was its master.

Like the rest of the family he had objected at first to the introduction of Hope; but since his

mother had insisted, and since also she possessed a certain charm of countenance if not of manner, he had grown reconciled to the situation.

And now he had even offered to drive her to Sabbath school, to accord her a place beside him in his buggy, to brave the eyes and tongues of the community; in other words, to be her social champion.

It was a little disconcerting to meet with so unqualified a refusal.

Her eyes were blazing and her cheeks, grown rather pale of late, were rosy again and hot.

"But you never come to Sabbath school," he observed.

"What's that to you?"

"Nothin', on'y there's many notices it; an' seein' you're father's—father's——"

Her eyes warned him to choose his words.

"Chore girl," said Hope. "Yes, go on."

"There's no sense in gettin' mad," said Young Luke.

"If I do my work, I guess I can go where I like," said Hope.

"But seein' you're livin' with father an' us I think you might. It don't seem right."

"Are you goin' to preach there then?"

"No; Wesley Jones is comin'. It's a testimony meetin'."

Hope continued to wipe the dishes.

At last he rose.

"I guess I'll take Liza Judd, then," he remarked, and went over to the looking-glass.

Hope watched him, and presently he turned toward her again.

"I'm sorry you ain't comin'. I would have liked drivin' you. An' you don't get out a lot."

He came a little nearer and rested his brown knuckles upon the table.

"I'm sorry you won't come," he repeated. She shook her head.

"I'm not goin' there," she said, and a vision rose to her mind of the rows of faces, critical, inquiring, pious no doubt, and friendly for none but a religious reason.

"I can't go there," she said, forgetting there was a listener.

"An' why not?"

"Oh, you don't understand. They'd ask me if I—if I——"

"Yes?"

"If I was washed an' saved an' — an all that."

Young Luke drew a long breath. It would seem that the lost sheep lay ready upon his path.

"Well, they're important questions," he said.

She was silent, bending over the plates, and her hair strayed about her eyes.

It was nearly two o'clock and the others had already gone away.

Young Luke would seize the opportunity.

"They're important questions," he repeated. "You ought to think about them. You ought really. An' what about the future?"

Then Hope looked at him with her flaming cheeks.

"I don't know, an' I don't care. An' why—why don't you go for Liza Judd?"

He ignored the question.

Then—

"I wish you were saved, Hope," he said.

Life had never surrounded him with temptation, and recent revivals had filled him with a certain desire for souls.

His countenance was honest and placid and his voice at the moment perhaps a little unctuous for his years.

Hope looked him straight in the eyes.

"I—I guess I hate you," she said. And really she looked almost beautiful.

Young Luke bowed humbly to the hand of persecution.

"There are times when one must speak," he said, but his eyes fell.

Hope stared at him.

"Look here," he continued. "Look here, Hope."

"Well, I'm lookin'," she said scornfully. "An' don't call me Hope."

He met her eyes angry and contemptuous and the scorn in her voice lashed him.

"Not call you Hope?" he asked very slowly. "Well, well, not call you Hope? An' what'll I call you then. Miss ——?"

Then her cheeks grew so white that he thought she would fall, but she stood upright and her eyes never wavered from his face.

And he picked up his hat and went to call for Liza Judd. And it was not until he had gone that Hope brushed the tears from her eyes.

Through the open doorway she could see the little school-house shining on the plains, and one or two rigs approaching it by different trails.

Afterwards the folk would disperse, and the young men would drive out, each with the girl of the moment, and the luckiest with the school teacher.

There would be family parties and friends going back together, and Becca would be driving with somebody, but no one would look for her.

She felt very lonely and exiled, and the little home on the Carroll trail, with all its poverty, seemed a paradise of freedom compared with this house where she now lived.

It was already nearly a year since she had come

to live with the Lukes, and it had seemed the longest year of her life.

It was very good of them to have taken her, as indeed on many occasions they had not failed to point out; and in their way she supposed they were kind.

But the atmosphere of their home stifled her. Moreover, until she had come here she had never realized that there had been anything disgraceful about her birth, or that she was a living witness to some distant hidden sin.

And it was altogether strange and not a little alarming to be suddenly placed in a family, such as this, its only black sheep.

And in spite of Mrs. Luke's motherliness this environment of spiritual condescension had come upon her life like a chill.

And indeed but for Mrs. Luke she would long ago have begged her way to Winnipeg, moneyless as she was.

She rose listlessly and set about preparing tea, and in time by twos and threes the others returned, the old man and his wife bringing Wesley Jones, Young Luke and Liza Judd, and Becca and her friends. They were a merry party, sobered into a more subdued enjoyment by the presence of the minister, yet conscious, as Hope felt, of being at ease in his presence in a way that was impossible for her.

She hung in the background, bringing the hot biscuits to the table, and setting out the little dishes of cranberry preserve.

The grace spoken by the minister included a clause in behalf of all outside the fold; and though no one looked at her when they raised their heads, yet her cheeks were flushed and she ate silently.

Once Mrs. Luke touched her hand and asked her if she had slept at all since dinner-time, but she shook her head, and the others discussed the testimonies of the afternoon.

From time to time Wesley Jones looked at her with his big eyes, and meeting them occasionally she wondered if he would talk to her presently.

And all the while her heart smouldered within her, to be sitting at the same table with Young Luke and Liza Judd.

And then, half way through the meal a knock fell upon the door, and it swung open and the way was filled with a big form and a pair of burly shoulders. For a moment the face was hidden in shadows, but presently became apparent, clean shaved, and more than ever bronzed, and the blue eyes met Hope's before they rested elsewhere.

"It's Roddy," she cried suddenly, and half rose from her chair, but sat quickly back, ashamed of being the first to have spoken, but

with a sudden sense of protection from his presence in the room. He came into the room with a smile and the others greeted him, making room at the table and looking at him curiously. Where had he been in these seven silent years, and what become?

And during the rest of the meal he was plied with their questions.

"Dakota two years, Colorado, Montana and Dakota again," he said, and told them no more. Then he looked at Hope.

"So now we are both travellers," he smiled.

The others looked at her, turning their eyes from him, but she seemed inattentive and he noticed that she was pale and her hair untidy; and with the picture he had imagined she seemed strangely in contrast.

Then the conversation drifted upon farming matters.

"So you have come back to the farm?" asked the old man.

Roddy nodded.

"For good?"

"Yes."

"Well, we're glad to see you back."

And after tea they took him round to see the cattle, soon to be sent west upon the ranges; and doing so, came upon Roddy's driver hitched up at the stable-door, and

"My, that's a good horse," said Young Luke.

Roddy looked at her with some satisfaction.

"Yes, she can go."

"Where'd you get her?"

"Montana. Picked her up on a bankrupt ranch. Just a bit of a long-legged colt, but she has good stuff in her."

"Trots?"

"Some."

They looked round the buildings and presently the others dispersed on various trails.

Then Hope stole out.

Perhaps Roddy would be alone and they could talk, as in the old days, before he went away.

Oh, why could she not go back and live with him as she used to do?

But she found him at the corral with Wesley Jones before him and went back into the house.

"I said you would become a strong man," said the minister, looking up into Roddy's eyes.

Then a question seemed to be upon his lips, for Roddy clapped a hand upon his shoulder and laughed.

"Good night, sir," he said, "good night."

II

II

BATCHING on the homestead Roddy soon settled down into an even way of life, dropping back into the old routine as though his absence had been the merest matter of weeks.

In the interval he had grown almost to the stature of his father, big and brown and broad-chested.

His eyes were still those of a boy, but graver, and his jaw was a man's.

And with his father a memory, and himself on the road to some success, and with no apparent vices Roddy discovered that the attitude of the community towards him had entirely changed.

The parents were unwontedly affable and their daughters regarded him with favour.

But he was shy in their presence and, avoiding the society of women, set himself to the task of keeping his farm in order.

He rarely visited, but had on a few occasions ridden over to spend a Sunday with the Lukes.

In Hope he had been frankly disappointed and not a little puzzled, and between them there seemed a barrier hard to understand. She was

listless and subdued, and though it was clear enough that the old manner of their intercourse could not return, yet he had not been prepared for the obvious restraint with which he had been met.

On the whole, however, it troubled him very little. It had merely meant the snapping of another link with the old irresponsible past; but that already was becoming unreal enough—strangely unreal.

Thus, Roddy, on a June day, pondering in the wake of his horses. At the end of the half-mile furrow he lifted his hands from the plough, breathing into his hot palms and tilting his hat back above his forehead.

His shirt lay open, revealing a brown bosom, swarthy and muscular, but no wind struck it with a welcome coolness.

The horses, glad of rest, panted heavily, and on their lean flanks the sweat lay like cream, its acrid odour rising slowly on the hot air, the incense of labour.

It was mid-afternoon and already a goodly strip of gleaming black earth bore witness to the day's endeavour, striking a clean and fragrant contrast to the dusty sods of yesterday.

Through all the working hours the sun had hung shadowless over the prairie, and the great world sweltered beneath its challenge. In the

brown grass, at Roddy's feet, the crocuses had long since faded, and the scarlet lilies, the latest of spring's glories, hung languorously upon their stems, flaunting drowsy banners on the roadway to death.

And by contrast, at the sun's appeal, the young wheat, straight and strong and vigorous, heralded the maturity of summer.

A hundred acres of it, sown in the early spring, lay in one piece beyond the trail, lusty and promising, and Roddy's eyes rested upon it with satisfaction.

It was a good crop, burdened with hope; and Roddy, crossing the trail, stooped down, caressing the young shoots tenderly with his brown fingers.

For to him, at this time, they represented the greater part of life, its promise, its possibilities, its end; and when his thoughts outleaped the horizon, he regarded the world and its problems in terms of wheat.

To-day, stretching himself contentedly, he looked out over the country placidly enough, as one looks upon the face of a friend, foreknowing his features and seeking rather the expression of his present mood.

And rising above the day's oppression with a perfect physical fitness, he found the world at peace and life good and glad and prosperous.

He picked up the reins and brought the horses round for the return.

The furrow he was to tread cut the prairie as though to a ruled pencil mark, straight as the flight of a bullet; and he noted with a certain pride the regular gleaming rows of upturned sods.

Already he had broken some thirty acres of this virgin prairie and he could not think of anyone who could have ploughed them better. A mile or two down the trail an Icelander was also busy breaking on his quarter section. And Roddy had strolled thither last Sunday to inspect his work; and the superiority of his own lay bare beneath God's sky for all men to see.

Not that anyone would notice it, he supposed, or noticing it think twice about it; but he was glad, nevertheless, that it was so, glad that they bore witness under heaven to the excellence of his workmanship—these silent brown acres that he had upturned through the hot weeks. And it was good work, worth doing well for its own sake alone, good, clean, conquering work, and wonderful too when one thought that never since the world was made had these acres yielded to the will of man; when one thought that he alone of all men of all ages was the first to levy tribute on their possibilities. Day after day his eyes had watched the narrow brown

ribbon reeling off the earthboard of his plough, reeling into an everlasting oblivion.

And what story of the ages might it have told, what legends of hunt and slaughter and life and love?

It seemed a pity that so ancient a dynasty should slip away into eternity thus unconfessed. Presently, grey and bleached, in the dry grass, a buffalo horn, lying half hidden, caught his eye and he flung it to one side upon the ploughing.

And as it lay there, wan, and a little pitiful in the splendour of the sunlight, it seemed to Roddy to stand for all that vanished past. He could imagine it proud, and in its rightful place upon some angry woolly head long since bowed down to death.

But when and how and why?

Ah, they were strange thoughts, these, that had come so often, and all unbidden into his mind of late.

Buffalo horn, brown grass, scarlet lily, pale crocus, they had all descended the selfsame road. They all stood for an early careless day that had found its evening, that would never return again, as trail and fence and all the growing wheat bore abundant testimony.

And of the era to come?

Well, on this hot afternoon, it was good to think that he was laying the foundations of the

glorious superstructure that assuredly must follow some day.

Of his own personal future Roddy in these days thought very seldom. A jack rabbit, bright-eyed and lithe, scuttled away from the horses' approach, and Roddy, stooping suddenly, flung a clod of earth which broke into fragments a yard or two behind it.

As it fled across the brown sods he laughed, the spell of his reflections broken; a deep good-tempered laugh, broad-chested, escaping easily from sound lungs.

"Coo—ee."

Roddy turned, and at the headland behind him saw a buggy drawn up and waiting apparently for his approach.

His quick eyes told him that old man Luke, his youngest son, the only one at home now, and Becca, were its occupants. They waved to him, and leaving his horses, he strode across the ploughing.

"Aren't you comin' in to town, Roddy?" they asked.

"No," he answered, and across the prairie saw other buggies driving towards Carroll.

"It's an important meetin', an' you ought to be there. There'll be lots o' opposition. An' I'm doubtin' if we'll get our prohibition after all."

But Roddy knew nothing of local politics and shook his head.

"I guess you'll have to get on without me," he smiled.

"You ought to come, Roddy; you ought really."

"You don't know which way I'd vote if I did."

And this apparently had not occurred to the old man, for he became silent. Then,

"My, that's a good bit o' breakin', Roddy," he said.

Roddy flushed under his brown skin.

"Goes a bit hard," he said. "Not as well as I'd like."

"But it's good work. You're makin' the place look smart, Roddy, real smart." And, "You must be workin' hard, Mr. Laville," smiled Becca.

"Then you won't be comin'?" the old man repeated, but Roddy shook his head.

And they drove away.

He returned to the plough thoughtfully. Praise had been rare to his experience, and it had certainly sounded strange to be called Mr. Laville, and desired to take a part in the councils of Carroll. And as he revolved these things in his mind there was born in him a sudden sense of his position as an owner of land, a new consciousness of his power.

Self-reliant, perforce, since his earliest boyhood, his years of wandering had merely developed his resourcefulness, rendering him more entirely adequate for the struggles of a western existence. But that he should be of any importance in the community, of any influence with his fellow-men, was an idea that came to him now with a sudden and strange emphasis.

And yet of course it was merely an attribute of age, the natural consequence of upgrowing, combined perhaps with the circumstances that had made him the lord of three hundred and twenty acres of Manitoban soil.

It was odd indeed that he should never have thought of it before.

And the idea was not unpleasant.

It seemed suddenly to widen the horizons of life; and as he fell into step behind the plough, it filled his mind with a swift, quaint sense of added dignity. But sitting in the doorway after supper a new and quite perplexing sense of inefficiency swept over him.

For who was he to stand among his fellows, and what could he tell them on any single subject, or of what possible value might his opinion be?

He knew a little of farming, could fell a tree with anyone, had only once been beaten in a fight, and that was three years ago in Montana

by a man of universal reputation, and many years his senior. But what of all that? He felt an overwhelming desire to unburden himself to some riper experience, to drink in wisdom from some maturer judgment.

In all these years, working from farm to farm, in shanty and caboose and camp, but always surrounded by the loneliness of the plains, he had never felt the need for any such companionship as this.

It was odd that a chance word on the ploughing should suddenly have awakened it.

As he smoked he looked thoughtfully round the shanty. It seemed very bare and offered but little comfort to his present mood.

On the top of the cupboard lay a Bible, the only literature he possessed; and so far as he remembered he had never voluntarily looked upon its pages. But now with a sudden impulse he took it down and read it in the doorway.

III

III

"BLACKETT, old chap, congratulate me. By Jove it's simply unbelievable. I swear it is—simply unbelievable."

Blackett looked up at Charlie with a smile. Sun-burned, débonnair, light-hearted, he seemed very little older to-day than on the summer afternoon seven years before when, in spotless raiment, he had left the train at Carroll.

"Simply unbelievable," he repeated and walked restlessly round the shanty.

"Sit down," said Blackett, pushing him some tobacco. "Sit down and tell me all about it. Stop rhapsodizing, there's a good chap, and talk plain English."

But Charlie ignored the tobacco, and with his back to Blackett, stood at the door, looking out over the lake into the plains beyond.

"Simply unbelievable," he said.

Blackett smoked in silence and resumed his newspaper.

"You've had some lunch?" he asked presently.

"Lunch?" said Charlie. "Lunch? I don't

know. 'Pon my word I don't know. I don't believe I have."

"Then sit right down. There is pork. There are potatoes. I will fry you some eggs."

Blackett waved his hand. He cherished his poultry and was proud of their produce.

Charlie sat down and began to partake.

And in the intervals of the meal he jerked out his tidings.

"Guess you knew things were pretty bad with me. Crops seized, you know. Horse died."

Blackett nodded.

"Well, I'd made up my mind to jump it—quit—clear out—vamoose."

Blackett smoked silently. He had watched Charlie with interest from the time he had come to Carson's to the day on which he had bought the farm beside Laville's.

He had heard the omen of their neighbourhood discussed with head-shakings. He had watched Charlie for four years spending his money and reaping but little result. And he had been sorry, since between them there had grown a certain friendship.

Charlie went on.

"Well, it's all right. Dear old people. Sent over a thousand. God bless 'em. Square it all up. Set me going again. Ripping, isn't it?"

"I'm glad," said Blackett.

Charlie laid down his knife and fork and waved the cheque.

Then he grew solemn.

"It's the absolute last, you know," he said, looking gravely at Blackett. "I can't even think how they've managed to send me this."

Blackett remembered three previous occasions on which cheques had come. Three in six years. Ah, those dear people at home!

"It's wonderful," said Charlie, "how one's people believe in you, isn't it? Now you think I'm a fool. I know you do, and so I am—a decent sort of fool perhaps and all that, but a fool all the same. To you people out here I'm nothing, but to them I'm a hero, struggling against unparalleled odds, you know, and all that, the son in Canada building up a laborious fortune. God bless 'em, but it's rather funny, don't you think? Sometimes I've thought of telling 'em the sort of chap I really am, but, bless you, they wouldn't believe me. They would say it was humility, self-depreciation, or something of the sort." He laughed but turned to Blackett again.

"I'm not going to let them down, Black, if I can help it."

They smoked in silence for a little, then, "Rum thing, isn't it, how much a fellow's ulti-

mate success may depend on the harmless delusions of his people?"

Blackett nodded.

"But I fancy it's not all delusion," he said. "Some of it is what you might call faith in the possibilities."

He smiled.

"You'd not deny the possibilities?" he asked.

Charlie bolted his last mouthful.

"Black, old man, come in to town with me. There's Jinny and the buckboard outside and I can't go in alone; can't really, you know, and you've not got much work going. You'll come?"

Blackett pondered and suddenly resolved.

"Yes, I'll come," he said.

As they drove down the trail Charlie talked incessantly, eagerly, and Blackett listened with a smile as he painted the golden future that inevitably awaited him.

For now, having settled all outstanding debts, he would have a balance in the bank and all the crop would be his own. And would it not be the best crop of recent years?

Blackett glanced round. Yes, the wheat looked well, nor could he remember to have seen the prairie filled with a greater promise. Barring accidents it should be a record year.

With his wheat drawn in and the wood got

up, he would run home to England. He felt that he needed it after his nearly seven years' absence.

Think of London after a Manitoban winter. Think of Regent Street and Piccadilly and the park and the lights, and the theatres, and the joys of a life that rolled on wheels of comfort, and brought a new enjoyment at every turn.

Think even of the country village, clean streets, and a Christmas dinner.

Yes, it was hardly believable.

Blackett smiled again. So the boy had got the glamour of home upon him, had forgotten the gaudy sunshine and the prairie. He chuckled.

"Think of fogs, and trams, and a cold in the head, and an atmosphere like the bottom of a thirty-foot well," he said.

But Charlie would have none of it.

"You're a pessimist, Black. I always said you were—the very deuce of a long-jawed pessimist."

But Blackett shook his head.

"I've known a good many men go home with its glamour upon them. They always come back, even those who have been the biggest failures. They always come back. The prairie draws them, calls them I think, and they can't resist it."

He nodded meditatively.

"I don't know what it is exactly, but there's something in the plains that lays a spell upon a man, something large and undefinable. A sort of freedom, I think, a kind of intimacy with the big things of nature, space and wind and sky, that one cannot get at home. Not so light-hearted?

"Well, no, I suppose not, but not a bit less glad. We're too near the heart of things to babble and be hilarious." He broke off.

"They always come back," he said.

Presently they passed Roddy at work upon his breaking, and he waved a hand to them.

"Funny, how that beggar has altered these last years," said Blackett, as they watched his towering form holding patiently behind the plough. "Gone out into the plains and become like them. Hanging about town would have spoiled him just as towns spoil most people; and the bigger the town the greater the damage."

Half an hour later they drove into Carroll, still asleep under the sky, and only a very little altered in these last seven years. There was another hotel and a new doctor, but the sidewalks were still wooden, and Main Street was the only one. Blackett regarded it a little anxiously and was relieved to find it empty.

Then as they passed the first hotel Charlie hesitated, half drawing up.

"We ought to drink a health to the old folk," he suggested, but Blackett shook his head.

"Remember last time," he said, and they drove on.

The door of the bank was closed. Next to it stood the second hotel and suddenly thence came Jack Carson.

"Hullo, boys," he shouted. "Taking a day off? That's good. Come in and have a smile."

Charlie hesitated again and flushed, glancing at Blackett, who sat impassively staring at the horse's ears.

"Come in and have a smile," repeated Carson.

Charlie's colour deepened, but there was something of challenge in Blackett's silence as he toyed with the reins. Then he jumped down and stepped swiftly into the bank. When he came out, Jack Carson was still lounging by the buckboard talking to Blackett, but Charlie brushed by him almost fiercely.

"So long, Jack," he said. "Regards to the missis." And then turning to Blackett:

"For God's sake drive!" he muttered. "Drive like the devil!"

A mile out of Carroll Charlie turned in the seat and held out his hand.

"Black, old chap, you're a ripper," he said.

"That's the first time I've ever banked a cheque in there and come out sober."

He drew a long breath, looking at the other with glad eyes.

"I wish to God I was a strong-minded beggar like you, Black," he went on.

But Blackett shook his head.

"I don't think anybody is really strong-minded," he said. "But there are some who have sort of guessed how weak they really are."

In Charlie's shanty they sat for a long time talking matters over, Charlie full of his future plans and the best disposition of his affairs.

Presently Blackett went across to the shelf.

Resting upon it were a couple of pewters, won at school for racing and rowing, and against one of them was balanced a photograph. He took it up and looked at it seriously. Then:

"By Jove, it does one good to see a face like that, a sweet English face. Who is it?"

Charlie looked over his shoulder.

"Oh, that?" he laughed. "Yes, she was a good little sort, Ethel Moore. Neighbours at home, you know; knew each other when we were children."

"Are you fond of her?"

"Rather. Yes, in a sort of a way, you know," and he laughed again. "We used to write to

one another when I first came out, but it's dropped lately. I wonder what she is like now. I once thought I would marry her, Black. I should like to see her again—if I were square, you know, and all that."

Blackett replaced the photograph.

"It's a good face," he said. "A sweet, good face."

During supper there was a knock at the door and Roddy came in, big and brown. He was glad to see Blackett, and between himself and Charlie, since they had become neighbours, there had already grown some sort of intimacy.

He listened gravely to the good news.

"I'm glad," he said, but Blackett thought he noticed the faintest shade of contempt in his voice, for Roddy had a small opinion of unearned riches.

Charlie was exuberant, repeating his plans for Roddy's approval, and presently referred to the incident at the bank.

Roddy nodded sympathetically.

"It *is* hard to refuse," he observed. "But there's times when you've got to. I had to once, over the way," he indicated the border, "an' they're a sight more touchy down there."

He smoked meditatively.

"The man grew mad, called me a——. Well, I wouldn't like to tell you in cold blood just

what he called me. I told him that if he repeated it I should kill him."

Roddy seldom spoke about his adventures and the others waited curiously.

"Well?"

"He did repeat it twice. He had a gun, you see, an' he was mad."

Roddy was looking thoughtfully over the prairie.

"Well?"

He stretched himself and his blue eyes came back to theirs.

"I killed him," he said.

Later in the evening Blackett and Roddy left the shanty together, and for a little while Roddy drove Blackett on his way.

The night was very dark and their faces were hidden from each other. Presently Roddy spoke hesitatingly, a little shyly.

"Say, have you—have you ever read the Bible, Blackett?"

Breaking suddenly on the silence the question sounded strange.

"Well, yes," murmured Blackett.

"I've been readin' it lately, for the first time," continued Roddy. "An' I wanted to ask somebody—I'm not fond o' Wesley Jones an' his crowd—I wanted to ask somebody. Do you believe in religion, Blackett?"

Blackett looked at him curiously.

"Religion?" he repeated.

"God an' eternity an' that."

Blackett smoked silently for a minute.

"Why, yes," he said at last. "I suppose no thinking man can deny that there's some sort of God—He has many names, Roddy, and instinct older than all the hills tells us that we live on when our bodies die."

"There was a fellow," said Roddy, "a parson chap he had been, who told me that it was all balderdash, religion an' sin an' that. Said that science proved we were just sort o' guided by our tendencies an' what we inherited an' that."

"And I can't disprove it, Roddy; but if it were so, if we really believed it and acted logically upon such a belief, don't you see how it would cut at the root of all progress and justice and all that makes life worth living? I don't know if anybody can disprove it, and yet it's simply unthinkable, and the judgment of all humanity tells us that we're free."

Roddy was silent.

Then presently,

"What do you reckon's the truth about Jesus Christ?" he asked.

"I'm no theologian, Roddy."

"But you've thought some, I guess."

Blackett took his pipe from between his teeth.

"I don't know what you're driving at exactly," he said, "but if you want my views, here they are. I don't believe I've ever told them to anybody else."

"Yes—go on," said Roddy.

"You must grant a God."

"Yes."

"And you must give me that the highest attribute, the greatest factor in human experience is love."

Roddy nodded.

"Grant that too," he said.

"And therefore it seems to me, since the Creator cannot be less than His creature, or be guided by any standard less great than the greatest, that it isn't illogical to suppose Him a Being in whom love or something higher is supreme.

"Yes—go on."

"And on the other hand, you have man with an inborn instinct for Deity, to be accounted for, which has led him in all ages to all lengths of self-sacrifice. It seems to me that communion between these two is not only possible but probable. I speak as a fool, Roddy."

"Keep goin'."

"Of those who profess such a revelation, Christ is incomparably the greatest, and has given us conceptions of God and conduct upon

which the dominant races of to-day are striving to build their social fabric. It's because these doctrines have emerged from their bed of superstition still undimmed that I believe in the divinity of Christ."

"An' His death an' risin'?"

"I like to think of them at any rate as sufficient proofs of love and immortality to have sent His followers into the world with an enthusiasm which is going to win it."

Roddy held out his hand.

"Thanks," he said. "I hated to ask you all this. Good-night."

Blackett went home thoughtfully.

"Now I wonder," he mused. "I wonder what has sent his mind into that channel."

Then as he filled his pipe the incident in the shanty came back to his memory, and

"By Jove," he said, "I shouldn't like to make him angry."

Roddy returned slowly to his shanty, but as he neared it, changed his mind; and passing his doorway held on down the trail towards the little school-house.

This lay about two miles distant and its windows were glowing in the dusk.

As he approached he saw that one or two rigs were drawn up outside, the ponies hitched to posts planted there for the purpose. Through

the open door the sound of voices came confusedly towards him, from which he gathered that he had not come too late to worship.

It had taken him some time to bring himself to the step that he contemplated, and he entered the little hall with something of defiance. As he seated himself, he became suddenly the object of all eyes, and one or two of the older men came down to him with words of welcome.

Roddy resented the spiritual over-friendliness of their manner, but thanked them gravely and held his peace.

Then Wesley Jones, a little leaner, but with all the old enthusiasm in his eyes, came up and shook his hand.

"I'm glad to see you, Roddy."

"Thank you. I've come to take the saycrament."

The minister stared at him a little doubtfully, but presently with a rare and opportune tact flung all criticism to the winds and looking into Roddy's eyes forbore to ply him with questions.

"I am glad you came," he said.

And so it happened that Roddy went home in the starlight filled with a strange and solemn purpose.

For to him there had been something extraordinarily real and almost terrible in the simple ritual of this Methodist communion. And

though he knew instinctively that he could never foregather with these followers of Wesley, sing their hymns or record their experiences, or believe very greatly in their revivals; yet he felt himself to-night to be at one with God in a sense that would surely henceforth dominate his life.

He made no resolutions, contemplated no reformation, but through a night that was hushed and reverent walked in the presence of his Master.

IV

IV

From the dingy kitchen Hope looked out upon a world at peace.

Between the buildings lay a patch of wheat, tall enough now to mould itself to the winds, gleaming and abundant.

And beyond this, stretching into the bluest of horizons lay the prairie, a tideless sea, golden and russet and appealing.

Some of its fragrance, conquering the hot yard, crept about the kitchen, and rendered ironing at once the most hateful and laborious of household duties.

In these days Hope had come to question even her rights of freedom and rejoicing, but now with a sudden sense of revolt left her task and stood in the doorway.

And on this glorious unclouded day the swift desire for liberty swept over her. Beyond a corner of the stables she could see the brown flanks of the bronco pony, corralled unwillingly, a prisoner like herself.

Why should not they both escape for one wild hour?

The old man and his son were in town, and the new English chore boy was in the stable and was of no account anyway. Becca was staying with friends—fortunate Becca, who had so many friends—and Mrs. Luke could not mind her absence for so short a while.

Obeying her impulse she took down the bridle from its nail upon the door and ran quickly to the corral.

She had never ridden the bronco before or indeed dared to ask for the loan of any of the horses, but she had already learned to ride as well as most Western girls, and her lack of fear made up for any absence of experience. And she rode bareheaded and without a saddle.

The bronco came to her willingly and took the bit with a good grace; and ensconcing herself upon his back, she rode out upon the plain, rode out, as it seemed, into summer and strength and youth, beyond creeds and classes, out into the glad air beneath the kind eyes of God.

And as she rode the zest for life grew strong in her again.

And what of toil and loneliness, condescension and looks askance? They fled to the winds. For this was life, this rushing of the sweet air, these well-knit rejoicing limbs that carried her, this proud little shaggy head with

its gleaming eyes and its nostrils snuffing the breeze, these brown plains buoyant to the tread, bathed in sunshine pure and limitless.

She would forget everything else, for this was life—to ride she cared not whither; to be alone with the skies, to be free, and under no command.

She felt almost jealous at the sight of a buckboard crawling up the trail, the only visible sign of gross humanity.

Its driver being immersed in his own thoughts had no eyes for the land about him, nor was he conscious of this rider upon the plains until the thudding hoofs sounded close at his side.

Then he looked up incuriously and met Hope; her hair, wind-blown, straying about her forehead; her eyes, black as ever, shining like stars, wide and frank.

She took him by surprise, and for a moment he looked at her in silence, pulling up involuntarily.

Listless? Why she was glorious, glowing. At the look in his blue eyes, her cheeks flushed and she smiled at him, the old open smile—and it was the Hope of seven years ago, grown seven years older, nor any longer the kitchen help of the Lukes, who was wont to smile upon him stiffly across their supper-table.

It was the Hope of the old days, of the furrow and the lake, come suddenly back to him, crowned with a riper womanhood. And,

"Oh, Roddy," she said, "I guess you never thought I could ride barebacked."

He looked at her with a slow absorbing gaze, at her easy poise, at the shaggy little bronco. Her eyes grew shy under his scrutiny, but he knew that this was the Hope of his boyhood, impulsive, intimate.

The reins were hanging loosely in his hand and he smiled at her.

"Why no," he said at last. "I didn't think you could look as well as that on horseback."

She laughed light-heartedly, enjoying his surprise. And,

"Oh, Roddy," she said, "I got so tired to death o' cookin' an' mendin' an' washin'—an' there's no one like——" she pulled up short, remembering her years.

"Yes," said Roddy, "like——?"

"It's all so different to—to what it used to be, you know, before—in the old days, you know."

Roddy nodded, with an air of understanding.

"Poor old Hope. Yes, it must be different."

They were travelling side by side now towards the Lukes' buildings, the horses at a walk.

"They're awfully good to me, Roddy," she said presently. "They're awfully good an'

kind, an' that, but—but they know I'm not the same as them, you see."

Roddy was puzzled.

"Not the same?"

She was indeed a great deal prettier than Becca, he thought, but this would not seem to be her meaning.

She coloured.

"Oh, in lots o' ways," she said.

Then she took a deep breath of the summer air, and something in her look, triumphant, expectant, urged Roddy to self-sacrifice.

"Gallop away, Hope, an' enjoy yourself," he said with a smile. "I'm comin' up to fetch a coulter from the old man's plough an' I'll be there directly."

She looked back at him one moment with laughing eyes, and the next was thudding down the trail, as fast as the bronco's unshod hoofs could carry her.

Roddy followed in the rattling buckboard and found himself laughing at her exuberance, her old enthusiasm for freedom and action. And as he watched her growing smaller down the trail, it dawned slowly upon him that life without her would henceforward and forever seem altogether empty and undesirable.

It was as though a veil had fallen suddenly from his eyes; as though, in a moment, all that

had lain dormant and unguessed in his boy's heart, since the day in Silver Lake, had awakened with a giant's strength and announced itself as love.

There was no deep change of feeling, nor indeed any great exaltation of spirit, only the awakening of a firm and irrevocable belief that some day she must give herself to him.

With this new point of view it was only natural that he should go back over their rapid interview.

She had talked to him with her old frankness —the frankness of a girl—but had shown no reluctance to part company at his bidding.

Her eyes had admitted all his old rights to intimacy, but they were eyes asleep. Well, she would be worth waking, worth winning.

Then he reviewed her position at the Lukes', and was not satisfied.

He must bring her back to him after harvest, when his first crop had been gathered in, threshed and sold, when he might rightly talk of marriage. He could not bear to think of her as unhappy, and yet he was certain that something was amiss. She had hinted at some inferiority and the idea made him hot, for wherein indeed could it lie?

As Luke's latest imported chore boy from London helped him to unhitch at the stable

door, Hope rode up to the corral. They watched her.

"Rides well, don't she?" twanged the new arrival.

Roddy was silent.

"Dashed well she rides, but it's a pity she's a——"

Then he happened to look into Roddy's eyes, and his cheeks grew the colour of chalk.

Roddy walked thoughtfully up to the house, his purpose a thousandfold stronger, the weeks to harvest grown suddenly interminable.

Mrs. Luke greeted him warmly, and Hope, back at her ironing, was unwontedly cheerful.

Mrs. Luke boiled some tea, and calling Hope from her work, smiled at her heightened colour.

"I guess you must go out ridin' again, Hope," she said, her old eyes twinkling as she listened to the girl's chatter.

Hope turned to her gratefully.

"Oh, Mrs. Luke, do you think I might; do you think they'd mind?"

"Gracious, no. Who'd mind, child? We want you to be happy—eh, Roddy? We want to see her happy."

"Yes," said Roddy with his eyes on Hope.

It was strange, this sudden transfiguration. After tea the women went back to their duties, but Roddy lingered, listening to Hope's remem-

brances of the old days, occasionally suggesting another; trying, a little clumsily he felt, to gain still more of her confidence, to realize, a little vainly, he was sure, how great or small a proportion of her thoughts he had filled in those half-forgotten times.

Mrs. Luke, watching them keenly, seemed suddenly struck by this new aspect of their acquaintanceship, for presently stealing out with the pails, she went off alone to milk the cows, leaving Hope ironing tardily, unaccustomed to the art of combining toil and conversation.

And it was only when Roddy, remembering his errand, went out to inspect the plough that she realized her neglected duty.

She ran out to the corral, where already Mrs. Luke was at work upon the last pailful of milk.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said.

But the old woman laughed and shook her head.

"Never mind, Hope, my dear. You'll have your share o' hard work yet. Run along an' enjoy yourself."

Hope looked puzzled, but went back to the house at her bidding, and Mrs. Luke, rocking herself, chuckled softly.

"She's asleep yet," she murmured. "Fast asleep."

"And who's asleep, Mrs. Luke?"

The old woman looked up, and Charlie, leaning over the fence, smiled down upon her.

"Caught you unawares," he laughed. "And who's asleep?"

But Mrs. Luke shook her head.

"I was on'y talkin' nonsense to myself, Charlie. I'm a great old woman for talkin' nonsense, eh?"

He laughed again.

"You're a dear old woman for giving advice," he said.

"I'm so glad about your good news, Charlie."

"It is good, isn't it?"

"An' you won't be givin' up the farm after all?"

"Devil a bit of it, Mrs. Luke.

Presently she twinkled.

"You'll be goin' home likely in the fall?"

Charlie was silent.

"An' not comin' back alone, perhaps?"

Then he shook his head.

"You're a foolish old woman, Mrs. Luke. I'm beginning to think you're right about yourself."

She grew more serious.

"Charlie, you'll take care of it this time. You'll not throw it away. You'll take real good care of it?"

He nodded.

"That's what I mean to do, Mrs. Luke."

"An' now you may carry my pails in."

He lifted them over the fence of the corral and walked by her side towards the house. The evening had grown suddenly still, and the old woman, looking shrewdly into the distance, prophesied rain.

Hope crossed the yard to meet them, still flushed with the glory of her gallop. She offered to take charge of the milk, but Charlie denied her; and Roddy, towering in the doorway, saw that his eyes were held by her beauty —saw it with a sudden sense of memory that sent his mind groping back through the years.

"May I stay for supper, Mrs. Luke?" he asked. "I think there's goin' to be a storm." And indeed as they entered the house its first mutterings echoed dully down the plains.

IV

IV

The occasion that reveals the hero affords him rather an opportunity to his dormant possibilities than an occasion for snatching the gift of courage from the gods. And so it is that these few incidents, trivial enough in themselves, were rather the springs upon which the blinds rolled up from Roddy's eyes than the donors of any faculty for vision.

Through a long line of Lavilles, clever and refined and to a certain extent spiritual, it is probable that the desire for culture lay as innately in his being as the puritan wish for God, bestowed by an obscurer peasant ancestry.

But whether or no this be a true interpretation, the fact remains that in these early days of June Roddy's horizon had widened with an almost unbelievable suddenness.

A dozen words from a neighbour had awakened in him the consciousness of position, of the responsibility of being. A casual glance had led him to the world of letters, entered through the gates of the gospel; and a sentence or two

had revealed to him, as he supposed, the motive power of the man for whom he had the most respect.

And it was characteristic of him, of the plains upon which he dwelt and the life he had led, that the new sensation, which had entered his life on a summer afternoon to the trample of a bronco's hoofs, had not sent the others staggering to the four winds of heaven, but had fallen sweetly into its rightful place in his new scheme of life.

For one brief hour it had indeed held him in a very complete mastery. The prairie, wet and fragrant from the brief storm of rain, had seemed a road royal, arched by triumphant stars. The night had been thronged with incense, and the sweet wind had taken his arm like a friend.

But the old world had spread about him familiarly enough next day, and in the usual routine of farm work life had soon readjusted itself.

And although the incident of his meeting with Hope clung about his memory as the gladdest and purest joy that life had thus far vouchsafed to him, his visits to the Lukes became scarcely more frequent than before, and no further opportunities had arisen for so intimate an intercourse.

And thus it came about that he held to his breaking this summer fallow, working through the long golden days, reading his books by the shanty candle, and revolving them in his mind down the black furrows of the morrow. By haytime he had read the Bible twice, noting the verses that appealed to him and seemed easy of understanding. He had mastered the "Pilgrim's Progress" and one or two of Shakespeare's plays, and had dipped into Browning and "Plain or Ringlets," and found the latter the more incomprehensible of the two.

Then on a hot Sunday he took a walk round his sloughs, discovered that the grass was ripe for cutting, and put away his books.

For harvest would follow close upon the heels of haying and the days for scholarship were obviously at an end.

And though it was with some regret that he came to this conclusion, yet the strenuous weeks to come were after all the best that the year had to offer, and beyond them lay home and Hope.

He came back from his tour of inspection in time for tea, and entering the shanty found Johnnie Peterson with a puzzled brow, bent upon a problem.

Johnnie was a youthful Icelander whom he had engaged as a helpmate for the next two months, and he stood now gazing with some

little awe and considerable curiosity at a delicate slip of cardboard.

Ensconced in his brown and rather dirty palm, it looked frail and ill at ease.

"Well, Johnnie, an' what have you found?"

The boy looked up.

"There was a feller here with Blackett," he said. "An' he asked for you; an' when I said you was out he gave me this." And he held it towards Roddy, who took it gingerly between his fingers.

It was a phenomenon with which he was unacquainted, and he looked upon it with interest and admiration.

"My word, it's a pretty little thing, Johnnie, eh?"

And indeed it looked strangely dainty and bizzarre in its unaccustomed surroundings, and bore upon one surface of it the gossamer legend, "Cyril Trevelyan, Dorrington Club, Mayfair, W."

Roddy read it several times, and presently placed it reluctantly upon the cupboard, where it shone between a grease pot and an axe, a lonely emissary of civilization. Presently,

"It's a visitin' card," observed Johnnie superiorly, with reminiscences of a week in Winnipeg, "an' I guess he's a traveller or a book agent, or somethin'."

"What was he like?" asked Roddy.

Description was Johnnie's forte.

He indicated a Homburg hat and a flannel suit with immaculate creases and every button intact.

He suggested spectacles and an aquiline nose, a well-kept appearance and an English accent. He guessed at middle age and considerable prosperity, and presumed an entire ignorance of the things that mattered.

"Shouldn't think he'd ever split a block o' wood in his life," concluded Johnnie, with some contempt. And subsequent discussion over the tea table merely strengthened his opinion of the stranger's general fatuity.

But evening brought them no solution to the problems of his errand or identity, and for the next few days only the white card bore witness to his existence.

And then it was that on a later afternoon Johnnie from his point of vantage on the load observed Blackett's buggy, bumping across the prairie to the slough in which they were at work, where the hay lay curled in cocks, and Roddy pitched giant forkfuls for disposal on the waggon.

"An' the dude's with him," added Johnnie.

Roddy looked round, and as the buggy drew up, found himself regarded by a pair of grey

eyes that observed him with a very searching gaze.

Roddy looked at him gravely. He was a new type and for the moment he felt instinctively distrustful.

But as Blackett introduced them he shook Trevelyan's hand readily enough, and

"I'm glad to see you," he said.

"Busy haying?" asked Trevelyan.

Roddy nodded silently. It was obvious.

Trevelyan climbed down from the buggy and laughing at the dubious look in Roddy's eyes, seized a fork.

"Let me have a try," he said. "For it must be twenty years since I was in a hay field."

His manner was well-bred and easy, but there was no suggestion of superiority and Roddy began to like him.

"Johnnie," he said, "throw down the other fork."

Trevelyan laid his coat upon the seat of the buggy and rolled up his sleeves. His arms were not devoid of muscle, but looked strangely white in contrast to Roddy's, and a gold signet ring shone upon one of his fingers.

With an unaccustomed fork he lifted little parcels of the sweet wiry hay, to the top of the load, where Johnnie, barelegged and irreverent, received them with open amusement.

Roddy watched him gravely, and when at length the haycock had been entirely transferred to the load, led the horses silently to the next.

Trevelyan grew keen on his work, and presently the perspiration broke out upon his cheeks and forehead.

He laughed back at Blackett.

"I'm not in much sort of training for manual labour," he said, and Blackett scoffed.

"Manual labour?" he asked. "My dear man, you don't suggest that that is manual labour? Why, you would take all day to fill a load with spoonfuls like that."

Trevelyan sighed, and mopped his face with a snowy handkerchief that again brought wonder to Johnnie's eyes.

"I give it up," he said, and handed his fork to Roddy.

Roddy stuck it leisurely into the cock, and without apparent effort lifted it bodily upon the load, the fork bending and creaking beneath the weight of hay.

"By Jove," said Trevelyan, and Roddy laughed at his discomfiture, the deep, good-tempered laugh that revealed, more than anything else, his absolute bodily health. It struck Trevelyan with a sudden satisfaction, like appropriate music.

"It's on'y custom," said Roddy, and lifted the

next one as easily, almost inundating Johnnie with a brown wave of prairie grass.

"It's on'y custom," he repeated, and held another, poised for a moment in mid-air, his biceps tense and swollen, lifting the rims of his rolled-up shirt sleeves.

Then he placed it on the load and stood for a minute smiling at Trevelyan, leaning easily on the fork, a giant at rest. And Trevelyan's heart went out to him.

Presently the load was completed, a big load towering above the horses, well built upon the waggon.

Roddy threw up the reins to Johnnie, a diminutive figure on this immensity of hay; and the boy crying shrilly to the horses, drove slowly across the prairie towards the homeward trail.

"An' mind the dip, Johnnie," warned Roddy.

Then he fell behind, talking to the men in the buggy, and gathered that Trevelyan was merely an English friend of Blackett's taking a year's holiday and spending part of it in Canada.

Roddy envied him a little in the anticipation of the countries and oceans that he proposed to visit, and later found himself telling of his own brief travels in Manitoba and the Western states.

Trevelyan seemed curiously interested in Manitoban farming, and Roddy presently found

himself talking very freely of his experiences, and entirely unconscious of the scrutiny with which his words and bearing were being regarded. And indeed so engrossed did they become that Roddy did not notice the predicament into which Johnnie had fallen until a sudden echo of his blasphemy fell upon a pause in the conversation.

Then they saw that the waggon had apparently stuck fast in a hollow of the prairie, where a moister earth was clinging about the wheels. The horses, pulling alternately in the traces, seemed powerless to move it, and the boy, with an exhausted vocabulary, was pulling angrily at their mouths.

"An' I told him to mind the dip," said Roddy.

"It looks a bad place to take a load through," said Trevelyan, but Roddy shook his head.

"It saves goin' round a lot, an' they've done it before," he said.

"Why don't you take them over there?" and Trevelyan pointed to a spot, drier apparently, and an easier roadway, some two hundred yards away.

But Roddy was obdurate.

"They can do it easy enough, if they like, on'y you've got to keep them to it."

He took the reins from Johnnie and climbed upon the load.

Then he pulled the horses round and brought them back above the place where the wheels had been held.

Blackett and Trevelyan watched him, and they heard him speak to Johnnie, standing beside him on the hay.

"Now see here, Johnnie, you must keep 'em to it in a place like this."

He bent down with a loose rein, and shouted a word at the horses. Then the great whip uncurled from his hand and fell suddenly about their flanks.

Straining together at the traces the two horses took the load as one, crossed the slough at a run, and mastered the rise without apparent trouble.

Roddy gave back the reins to the boy, and rejoined the others.

"It was in 'em all right, you see," he explained. "An' that's the on'y way with difficult places. You've got to take 'em solid an' with a run."

He looked seriously at Trevelyan, and the older man nodded. "I fancy you're right," he said.

After supper they bade him farewell, and as they drove home together Blackett turned slowly to his companion.

"Well?"

Trevelyan leaned back and closed his eyes.

"A giant of a fellow," he mused. "And reads the Bible and Browning—saw them in his hut."

Blackett laughed.

"He has developed quite a desire for literature lately," he said.

Trevelyan nodded.

"Good," he said. "Waking up, you suppose?"

"Something like that."

"Reads the Bible and Browning, and knows how to drive too, by Jove."

"He's good with horses."

"A Methodist?"

"No, I think not. Not exactly."

"But not a pagan?"

Blackett shook his head.

"Is he—there are no ties?"

Blackett laughed.

"He isn't married, if that is what you mean. And I don't fancy that he has even been in love."

"That's better still." They drove in silence.

"Have you ever seen him—roused at all?"

Blackett shook his head.

"No," he said slowly.

"But it's possible," said Trevelyan with conviction. "With those eyes of his it's more than possible."

As they neared the lake a buggy, driven very

fast, overtook them; and above the whirring of its wheels rose a girl's laugh as she replied to some remark of her companion.

Their faces passed swiftly in the dusk, but Blackett and Charlie recognized one another, and bade good night; and Blackett saw that the girl was Hope.

Then as they turned up the trail to his shanty Trevelyan emerged from his meditation.

"Dick, old man," he said slowly and gladly, "He'll do—this heir of ours—he'll do."

VI

VI

Roddy was up before five on the morning of the Carroll races.

The cool dawn, clear and radiant, promised a day that should be cloudless, and the races would be plentifully attended.

As he unbarred the stable door, Nellie, his Montana pony, looked round at him and whinnied, and entering he passed his hand lovingly down her lean flanks, allowing her presently to nuzzle his shoulder as he combed her tawny mane.

At the rush of sweet air coming in through the open doors, she threw back her ears playfully and pawed upon the wooden floor of her box with hoofs that were fretful of imprisonment.

"All right, old lady," whispered Roddy. "You can go for all you are worth this afternoon—for all you are worth, old rascal."

She chewed at his shirt sleeve, nodding her dainty head, and Johnnie coming in with a song and a pail of water added his caresses.

"Oh you daisy," he said. "You little daisy. An' she's lookin' fit to bust herself, Roddy."

"She'll have to go near doin' it, John, if she's to win this afternoon."

"She'll do it," said Johnnie confidently, jumping up and down. "There's not a horse round here can touch her."

But Roddy shook his head.

"There's Bill Playgood's trotter comin' from Poplar River, an' there's Jack Luke's Ginger an' Charlie West's new driver. An' she's a terror by all they say. Oh, she'll have to go all she knows if she's goin' to pull it off."

"An' she will, too. She's tearin' fit, Roddy."

"She's well trained all right," said Roddy, complacently. "An' she won't break, not if she's trottin' mouth to mouth, an' on'y a lap to go."

And while Johnnie performed the grosser duties about the stable he dedicated the next two hours to her toilet.

For on this July afternoon all who might would gather into Carroll, where there were races of all descriptions to be run, from the Carroll cup for the fastest trotter to the hundred yards sprint for boys under twelve.

There would be one or two travelling minstrels, and at night a concert in the wooden skating rink.

And for this one day all who might would take a holiday, coming in from lonely shanties

to foregather with their fellows and abandon themselves, a little heavily perhaps, to recreation and revel.

To Roddy the social side of the day's enjoyment appealed very little, but he was glad to feel that now he had an opportunity of testing the worth of his Montana pony, bought with his first savings, a colt unbroken, and lovingly trained in his spare moments. His quick eye had picked her out of a herd, being sold by a bankrupt rancher, and he was glad now that his boyish judgment had not been at any rate entirely at fault. For in the last few years Nellie had grown tough and slender, and each season had added its gift of speed.

By ten o'clock she stood upon the trail, trim and buoyant, and Roddy in his big hat and best suit led her confidently between the shafts of his buckboard.

Johnnie, full of the day's possibilities, had already stolen away into town, clambering up into a waggon-load of Icelandic relatives, that had passed earlier in the morning.

But Roddy, more deliberate, went back into the shanty and for the first time in his life looked twice at the parting of his brown hair.

Then he climbed slowly into the buckboard and drove down the trail.

But not yet into Carroll, for striking out

across the country, leaving Silver Lake upon his left, he held south and east.

Two or three buggies met and passed him filled with brown-faced passengers, uncomfortable in white collars and Sunday clothes.

One or two of these greeted him and some looked curiously at the pony, whose powers were a matter of guesswork to most of the community.

Roddy drove leisurely and presently met Jack Luke, who half pulled up.

He was married now, and his heir peeped over the dashboard.

"Lost your way, Roddy?" he called.

But Roddy smiled.

"Just takin' a drive round, to loosen her joints," he murmured and held on down the trail.

Half an hour later he drew up in the Lukes' yard and looked about him.

The farm seemed entirely deserted, and alighting he knocked upon the door.

The old woman opened it presently and smiled up into his anxious eyes.

"I was just drivin' round," he said clumsily, "an' thought perhaps there was some of you might like a lift into town."

Mrs. Luke shook her head.

"They've gone," she said.

"All of them?"

"All but me, an' I'm too old fer gin-bangs an' such like. Hope went in an hour ago."

"Hope?" queried Roddy crestfallen.

The old woman nodded.

"Charlie West came by an' drove her in."

"Came by?" doubted Roddy.

She smiled.

"It does seem a long way round, seein' he lives next door to you."

Roddy coloured, quick to notice her raillery, but it had not been unkind.

"Won't you come yourself?" he asked.

But she shook her head.

"You would have to bring me back an' I guess you mightn't have room.

"Now drive away into town like a good boy and win your race."

But to Roddy the day had grown suddenly harsh, the plains gaudy and arid, and he put Nellie along at a pace that in view of the efforts before her he should never have attempted.

"By Gad," said Mike Malone, whom he passed upon the trail, "that mare can go, an' he looks like meanin' to win too."

And he made a mental resolve to lay a spare dollar on Roddy's success. By the time Roddy entered Carroll the little town was already well filled and he was continually greeted by loungers and passers-by. At every hook and hitching-

post, horses, kempt and unkempt, of all sizes and breeds and ages, were standing captive. The livery stables, doing a roaring trade, were already more than full, and the yard was crowded with rigs of every description.

Men in broad-brimmed hats sauntered about, smoking big cigars, comparing notes on the progress of crop and discussing the prospects of the day.

The Carroll children, suffering penalties of shoes and stockings, had faced these disabilities manfully and pervaded the place, frolicsome and cheeky.

Some of them clung about Roddy, forgetting the awe with which in other days they had been taught to regard him. They hovered round Nellie, but hung back, despite boastful vauntings from her flat ears and the whites of her eyes.

Some of Roddy's fellows of his Carroll days, noticing her beauty, came round him now with words of slow admiration, and their praise was sweet to him. And in the moil of escaping the children, attending to Nellie and overhauling the sulky, he forgot his disappointment, entering the hotel presently, peaceful and hungry.

The room was crowded, and had not one of the diners risen as he entered he would not have obtained a place.

As it was, he found himself seated between

Carson and Blackett, on whose other side sat Trevelyan.

They exchanged greetings, and presently the landlady, buxom and personable, laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Well, Roddy," she said, "I guess you've still got the same old appetite, an' it's good for us that they don't all eat like you."

And since the inclusive charge was a matter of twenty-five cents, there was some truth in her remark.

Roddy laughed, and Carson looked up at the landlady.

"He hasn't been crossed in love yet, or had his wheat frozen. You wait a bit."

"Hark to the grumbler," said a fresh voice, and turning round Roddy saw that Charlie had entered the room. He was scanning the table, looking for vacant places, and behind him stood Hope.

Her eyes were bright, and when she saw Roddy she smiled, though his face was grave.

"There's no room for you, Charles, my boy," said Carson. "You must try Mother Jones's. How are you, Miss Hope?"

Hope, abashed under the gaze of many eyes, bent her head and said she was well, and the next moment went out with Charlie.

Roddy continued his meal stolidly, but his

eyes had been observant, and in the faces of the men opposite him he had read that which sent the blood spinning faster down his arteries.

And presently he heard them speaking to one another.

"By Gad, that was a pretty girl."

"Who is she?"

"I tell you Charlie's in luck, boys, an' don't you forget it."

And the desire in his heart grew suddenly tenfold.

He paid his twenty-five cents to the landlady and laughed at her rueful countenance until she too broke into smiles.

"Just the same old Roddy," she said, and laid her hand upon his sleeve. "An' never mind, Roddy boy, go in an' win. An' see, you're back in the Dominion now, an' right welcome."

Roddy smiled and thanked her, telling her that he meant to try, and she wondered at the queer light in his eyes, for to him Nellie and the cup had become matters of small importance.

He went out into the hot street with her words in his ears.

"Dominion?"

Oh, it was a fair dominion that had smiled upon him and grown suddenly so far away. And was it ever indeed to be his?

"Dominion."

The words sounded ironical.

He turned toward the stables to take a last look at Nellie, but his thoughts were far away and his eyes unseeing; and so much so indeed that he passed several of his friends without a shadow of recognition.

Trevelyan spoke to him twice before Roddy's eyes regarded him seriously.

"Going down to get ready for the race?" he was asking.

"Why, no—yes. That's what."

"Going to pull it off?"

"Tell you later."

"How's the little mare?"

"Fit."

Roddy held on his way and Trevelyan looked after him amusedly.

"Well, I have met better conversationalists, by Jove," he murmured.

Half an hour later Roddy drove out to the course in his racing sulky.

The prairie was hard and dry, and but for a single storm no rain had fallen for many weeks.

He hitched up his pony to one of the corners of the ring, and his glance, roaming among the groups scattered upon the grass, fell suddenly upon Hope and Becca standing together and watching a foot race between some boys. He strolled toward them, and as he came they

turned their faces to him, frank girl faces with eyes adance to the light and movement around them.

They chattered to him without restraint, recounting their doings and telling of the folk they had met, and Roddy's spirits rose as he listened to them.

Presently Becca was captured by some Canadian friends, becoming one of a group surrounding a banjoist on a tub.

And Roddy turned to Hope.

"So you are enjoyin' yourself?" he said.

"Why, yes, of course I am. It's just lovely seein' all the people an' the racin', an' all, an'—— Oh, Roddy, are you goin' to win?"

"Can't say. There's Playgood, you see, an' West, an' some more."

She was silent.

"You an' West are pretty good friends," suggested Roddy.

"Mr. West drove me in. Wasn't it good of him?"

"Very."

"He was passin', you see, an' the others hadn't any room, an' I had never thought about comin' in at all, until he came. Oh, I'm so glad I came, Roddy."

He was looking at her curiously, but her eyes were fearless and unconscious. There was a

quarter of an hour before the race and the sulkies were collecting about the course.

Roddy bent over her.

"I say, Hope, do you—are you——?"

But the sentence died on his lips, for looking up, his eyes encountered Charlie's, gay and laughing.

"Hullo, Roddy, an' how's the mare?"

Roddy's face had clouded, but Charlie's manner compelled a smile.

His ease dominated the conversation, and Roddy, towering silently beside him, knew himself by comparison crude and unpolished.

And what indeed was the secret that all these home-bred Englishmen possessed—Blackett, Carson, Trevelyan, Charlie—all of them?

Surely it must be something more than the knack of turning a phrase or using the right word.

And half despising it, he yet felt its lack and a desire to share it with them.

He looked at Charlie thoughtfully, at his handsome youthful face; and caught, as he did so, the caress in his voice.

No wonder that women loved him, and no wonder that Hope was even now responding with bright eyes and a heightened colour.

And yet she was a child of the air and the lake and the furrow, and should surely be able

to fathom the emptiness of soft words and a lowered voice.

But the bell, gentlemen, the bell.

"Our race, I think," said Charlie, and Roddy, suddenly reminded, turned away to his sulky.

"Good luck," sang Hope to both of them.

Love and sport—they tug at most men's heart strings, and if the one is more persistent in its wooing for attention, the other for briefer moments holds a mastery well-nigh as complete.

And being young and healthy, before the first lap was finished, all Roddy's heart was in the machinery of his driver's stride and the poise of her eager head. Bent forward with his hands almost touching her polished loins, his eyes never wavered from the course. He sat impassively with closed lips, though his opponents were urging their horses with quick sentences.

At the end of the first lap he was third, and both Playgood and Charlie were seemingly outdistancing him.

The second lap found him no farther behind, but Charlie was leading and Playgood still in front of him.

Roddy drove with apparent unconcern, and only once at the far end of the course, when a handkerchief fluttered over the wire barrier, the flicker of a smile crossed his lips.

"Oh, Roddy, make her go," cried an anxious

voice; and Johnnie leaning over the wire, looked after the whirring wheels with entreating eyes.

Half way on the third round, Roddy drew level with Playgood, and already the famous trotter from Poplar River showed signs of restlessness.

The whites of her eyes rolled uncertainly, and as Roddy drew ahead, she suddenly broke into a canter, fretting at the bit.

Playgood leant back on his lines and Roddy with a half turn of his wrist suddenly forged ahead and took the inner side at the bend.

There was a shout from the onlookers craning eagerly over the course. Playgood swore and pulled out, and the race lay between Charlie and Roddy.

And now the Montana mare began to skim the ground like a thing of wings; and Roddy, leaning forward a little, carried the light of victory in his eyes.

They entered the last lap with Nellie's nose at the hub of Charlie's wheel.

The dust flew about them. There was a hoarse shouting and a conflicting change in the betting. The girls waved handkerchiefs and scarfs, and as they entered the last stretch there was a rush of those behind to see the finish.

The white tape flickered across the course between the judges' hands, and it was character-

istic of Charlie that at the same moment he turned his face towards Roddy's sulky with a laugh.

The Montana pony drew level, and for a few paces they ran nose to nose.

Neither broke, and then with her beautiful stride Roddy's pony came away, a foot, two feet, a yard, and ran at last into the tape the winner by her own length. There was an instant crowd round the sulkies, and lean-faced men, who drove or bred or raced, clustered about Roddy with comments and praises and not a few offers of purchase.

Roddy sat in his sulky, brown and triumphant, smiling down upon the others, and shaking his head at all temptations to part with his mare.

Through the crowd Charlie pressed towards him with an outstretched hand.

"By Jove, your mare's a good 'un, Roddy," he said as they shook hands.

And so Nellie came into her own.

From now there set in a dispersal of the company by two and threes, some returning to more distant homes, others gathering back into Carroll for the evening festivities, and for the hour Roddy was a hero.

At the stables he was again surrounded with congratulations, and the points of the race were further discussed and analyzed, Roddy leaning

nonchalantly against the door post, listening with his grave smile.

At last, tired of praise, he stretched himself, and leaving the little group of stable hands, strolled out across the yard.

The evening air was cool now and sweet, lending its laurels to his brow, and with the glow of victory still upon his cheeks he came suddenly upon Blackett and Trevelyan. They shook his hand and added their congratulations, standing for a little while discussing the race.

And as Roddy left them, bronzed and burly, Trevelyan took Blackett's arm with half a sigh.

"Ah, youth and strength and success," he said. "How good they are! And when, I wonder, did you and I last feel as Roddy is feeling now—at Cambridge, was it? or on our first peak in Switzerland? Or earlier at school when we got our first eleven caps?"

At the next corner Roddy met Becca and Hope, arm in arm, and carrying parcels of confectionery.

He stood above them laughing, and shook his head as they offered him some of their maple-sugar candies.

"Oh, Roddy," cried Hope. "I'm so glad you won, and isn't Nellie a darlin'? Poor Mr. West, an' he was so near winnin' too."

Roddy smiled.

"He didn't mind. He took it well. He—he's a good sort, Hope."

Hope nodded.

"He's takin' me to the concert," she said.

"An' drivin' you back, I suppose?"

Roddy spoke carelessly, but there was something in his voice that brought her eyes to his face, where for the first time she suddenly divined the trend of his thoughts.

She tossed her head a little.

"Why of course," she said, and under his gaze her cheeks flushed for the first time.

Becca had turned aside to speak to some friends, and they stood for one moment alone and facing one another.

"I went round to Luke's this mornin', meanin' to bring you in," said Roddy.

"I'm sorry."

"You—aren't goin' back at all on your old friends, Hope?"

"You were a little late, weren't you?"

She spoke lightly, and in a tone that was strange to him; and looking down at her gravely, he realized that the old comradeship of their boy and girl days would not come again, and was already being replaced by a new and more precarious relationship.

While as for Hope, since to her somewhat solitary position this situation was novel and by no

means unpleasant, there was perhaps a little exaggeration in the intimacy with which she turned to Charlie and bade Roddy a very good evening.

Nevertheless a little later Roddy took his way to the concert hall. In his mind there still lingered some possibility of persuading Hope, and in the thought of it the triumphs of the afternoon seemed small indeed.

Leaning back among the shadows at the end of the hall, it was some time before he caught sight of her face.

She was gazing at the evening's comedian with a rapt expression, and he was satisfied to see that her companion seemed, for the moment at any rate, to claim but a small share of her attention.

Yet he was leaning towards her and his arm lay idly along the bench at her back. It might have been merely the attitude of ease.

Roddy glanced at the crowded seats that intervened, and once for a moment looked unwillingly at the stage.

The chuckles of the audience sounded foolish. Then he turned on his heel and went out into the open air.

Nellie whinnied as he approached, but he did not caress her.

And instead drove silently home, for even the choicest of silver cups is cold company on a moonlight trail.

VII

VII

MANITOBA under wheat—spread out beneath the bluest of skies a vast and glistening sea—this is the dream of those who love her best.

And even now to some extent it is being realized, and already the traveller may lift up his eyes and look upon plains that to the uttermost limit are veritably white unto harvest.

Even Trevelyan, too wrapped up in social reformation at home to have the imperial view, seemed struck with the wealth of these great stretches of wheat.

They were walking down the trail and at the parting of two ways paused.

"So you have decided to tell him?"

"Yes, absolutely."

"And counted the cost to him if—well, if he proves unsuitable at home?"

"He won't."

"I would like to see his face when he hears your errand, this heir of yours."

"Why don't you come with me?"

Blackett shook his head.

"Better not," he said.

Trevelyan walked slowly across Roddy's pasture, and Blackett turned into Charlie's shanty.

"So your neighbour won the cup, Charlie?"

"Yes, bad luck to him," laughed Charlie. "And deserved it too, for he has picked up the best trotter I have ever set eyes on, and he knows how to make her go."

"But you enjoyed yourself pretty well?"

"Why, yes, I had a pretty good time, of course."

Blackett laughed, and his eyes sought the photograph on the shelf.

"Oh, fickle Charles," he said.

Charlie coloured a little.

"Not at all; but I say she is a fine girl, Blackett, don't you think—so breezy and natural—and her colour, Black, like roses in the wind, and her eyes! Have you ever noticed her eyes?"

"You are quite eloquent, Charlie."

"Oh, I don't mean anything, of course; nothing serious you know, or anything of that sort, and besides there's her parentage and all that."

Blackett nodded.

"Precisely, and the people at home?"

"Yes, and harvest, old man, harvest. And did you ever see such crops?"

They were standing at the doorway, and in the last light of sunset the plains lay flooded with gold, caught and prisoned by a million heads of wheat.

"Did you ever see such crops? Why it means England—and—and Ethel perhaps, and a balance at the bank. Oh, it's almost too good to be true."

Later in the evening he walked back with Blackett, until Trevelyan joined them. Then he bade them good night and Trevelyan gave him a cigar.

When he had gone Blackett turned to his companion.

"Well?"

"Oh, he took it very calmly and refused to come with me, at any rate for the present. I don't think he at all realizes the position—talked about harvest, you know, and a matter of crops."

About ten o'clock Roddy went out into the moonlight for a last look at the horses, and on his way back from the stables strayed out into the wheat.

The night wind sent it shimmering about his knees, silver and opulent, and bending down he took an ear or two between his hands.

"Pretty nigh ready," he murmured and lifted his head gladly, for the tardy weeks were at last

nearing completion, the weeks that should end the disquiet in his heart and lead Hope to his arms.

And so the great fields swayed and sighed, swayed to the hot wind and sighed with the burden of their fruitage.

And with the accustomed murmur in his ears Roddy fell asleep.

VIII

VIII

An hour later the door of his shanty was flung suddenly open and Charlie, with wild eyes, pulled him from his bed.

His face was black, and his hands charred and bleeding.

"Good God, Roddy! Oh, good God!" he shouted.

For a minute Roddy stared at him dumbly, but the next had pushed him aside and was standing in the doorway.

And before his eyes, eating its way into the heart of his ripened wheat, with its apex at the trail and an ever broadening base advancing towards him, spread a wedge of fire.

In the calm moonlight the little flames snarled and glimmered, peeping over the wheat-tops, pallid and unearthly, but fanned by the risen wind into a roar that was real enough.

For a moment or two Roddy looked at the sight in silence, then he turned to Charlie.

"The wind's risin'," he said quietly. "An' there's nothin' can save our wheat or my buildin's. How are yours?"

"One fire-guard. Good God!"

"We'll have time to plough another and then get back to the cross trail. That'll check the fire, an' we may save Johnson's wheat an' the rest. If it jumps the trail, it'll burn out the settlement."

Johnnie had crept out of bed and stood now beside them, shivering in his knickers as Charlie cursed Trevelyan's cigar, himself, and the flames. Roddy took him by the shoulders.

"For God's sake pull yourself together, man, an' get back to your buildin's an' hitch on to a plough. You haven't got all night to think about it."

He thrust him away and hurried down to the stables.

There he loosened Nellie and called Johnnie.

"Get up," he said, "an' ride for all you know to Johnson an' Pete an' the rest. Tell 'em to bring sacks an' get along Johnson's trail. See? Now get, an' ride Nellie till you bust her."

Johnnie, scared and half naked, scrambled up and beat upon the pony's sides with his bare heels as he galloped down the trail. On his way he passed Charlie, running with hoarse pants towards his own shanty.

Left alone, Roddy flung the harness on one of his teams and hitched them to a plough. The other horses, cut loose, huddled through the doorway and wandered out into the wheat.

The fire was now within twenty yards of his shanty, and to the east had crept already into his pasture.

The shout of it filled his ears, and the air was thick with smoke and glowing wisps of straw.

Biting his lips and brushing the water from his eyes, he lashed the horses across a corner of the next field, the plough bumping about their heels as they plunged through the wheat towards the trail.

Torn and bleeding, it was all Roddy could do to hold them in control as they clattered at a gallop down the trail to Charlie's shanty.

This lay half a mile distant, and half a mile beyond it again Johnson's trail, leading out of the main track to Carroll, struck transversely across the line of fire.

It was a broad stretch of bare roadway, bordered on each side by several yards of close cropped prairie grass, and it was here that Roddy hoped the flames might be controlled, so that at any rate the great fields to the south might be saved from destruction.

On the west the fire was creeping alongside the main trail to Carroll, but would scarcely spread across it, and eastwards would not take the unbroken prairie, with its close grass, at such terrible speed.

It was south in the path of the wind that the danger lay, and should Johnson's trail be leaped, who could say where the fire would burn itself out?

Charlie was already driving his plough in a wider circle round his home and buildings, his face dusky and haggard in the moonlight.

Roddy fell in behind him, and the two, after their different manners, worked against flame and time, Charlie, with hot curses, lashing his horses, Roddy, grim and silent, watching the marching fire with stern eyes. And it strode now like a giant, the distance melting before it, the wheat bowing at its feet.

For half a mile the front of it blazed and crackled, the flames lurid in the smoke, pale in the moonlight, rising and falling as the hot wind fanned them or forbore.

At last, with a curse, Charlie loosened his horses from the plough and rode down to Johnson's trail, where already a little group of men had gathered at the call.

But Roddy, grim and scorched, with the lust of battle in his heart, held on for another round.

For there was that in this elemental warfare, which was appealing to some instinct deep in his being, that held him thus with set teeth and clothes wringing with sweat.

Blinded and gasping, he held out to the end of his round before cutting the traces and galloping reluctantly back to the trail.

Looking over his shoulder he saw that the fire had leaped the guard as though it had been paper, and was already licking up the grass about the stable door.

And at the sight of it he laughed—one to the enemy; it was going to be a good fight.

Farther from the flames the wind beat upon his forehead, and he wondered how they would hold them at the trail.

They should be able to beat it out at the roadway, but the air was already full of burning straws; and should these get a hold of the fields beyond, no power of man could turn calamity aside.

As he anticipated, the fire was not spreading much to east and west, and would probably die out at the nearest trail on either side; but, even so, there remained this half-mile wall of fire, racing down to them on the wings of the wind over the richest wheat of memory.

At the trail he found a dozen men, and already they were lining out upon the farther side of the open land, drawn and resolute, waiting the fire's approach.

At their back the great fields still swayed and sighed, swayed to the night wind and sighed

with the burden of their fruitage, with the hopes of half the settlement in their bending heads of wheat.

In front of them ranged an orgie of destruction, with blackness in its wake; and above their heads the grave moon, cold and austere, shone down from a sleeping sky.

Roddy fell into his place, watching with the eyes of a boxer for the first sign of his opponent's lead.

The joy in his heart had already mastered the first shock of seeing his wheat destroyed.

What of yesterday and to-morrow, when to-night was such a strife as this?

But Johnnie, with tears in his eyes, had crept to his side, and whimpered of ashes and ruin.

Roddy took his arm and set him about.

"Look yon," he said, "an' don't talk."

For in the field at their back had fallen a parcel of flaming straw, which already was laying fingers upon the wheat around it.

Johnnie sprang upon it with the sack in his hands, beating it out breathlessly; and when his task was accomplished, had another and another waiting at his hand.

And now all of them fought for home and fortune and all that was best in life, fought and sweated the night long on bent knees by the trail, beating out the tributaries of fire, or strid-

ing back among the wheat to defeat its messengers from the sky.

The dozen had grown to a score, and through the long hours they held the fire at bay, fighting silently as men fight death.

Until at last, as the night wore slowly away, the struggle slackened into conquest and the fields behind them, still whispering their promise of hope, stood heavy for harvest and undestroyed.

Slowly they gathered on the trail, and with the tension loosened faced one another haggard and triumphant, nor was ever a victory sweeter than theirs.

Only Roddy and Charlie, looking out over a mile of ashes, had tasted the bitterness of defeat.

But for them the reaction had been bound to come, and now in this terrible loveliness of dawn their dreams lay black before their eyes, and their acres, for a long mile, barren and evil and odorous.

Here and there among the ruins of their crops a charred fence-post faced them mockingly, its tangled wire catching the light of dawn, shining out among the ashes.

Charlie's shack, strangely untouched, stood out ridiculously among his ruined fields, but over Roddy's there still hung the mantle of destruction.

The others came round them now with words of clumsy comfort, but Roddy, staring out stonily across his farm, saw only two eyes he dare not question, two lips he must not kiss.

Then he turned with an effort and smiled.

"I guess it'll be rare for the land," he said, and they went in to Johnson's shanty for breakfast.

An hour later Roddy went back to his buildings to take count of any salvage there might be, and found very little.

He came slowly back to his neighbour's shanty, and as he did so a sudden wave of pity came over him.

For what indeed could this mean to Charlie, this destruction of his last chance?

The shanty was very still as he approached, and a sudden doubt swept into his mind.

He came at great strides, kicking through the hot ashes, and flung open the door. And as he did so, Charlie looked up at him, with parchment cheeks and dark furrows beneath his eyes.

Roddy had never seen such desolate eyes.

He was sitting at the table, and under his shirt sleeve something gleamed in the sunlight.

With a swift movement Roddy stretched across the table, and snatching it up, held it behind his back. Then with his other hand he

forced Charlie away from him, looking him in the eyes until his gaze fell.

"Don't be a fool," he said quietly.

In the evening of the same day Roddy came wearily to Trevelyan.

"I guess you can take me away now," he said.

And so it came about that a week later Roddy and Trevelyan drove into Carroll to board the day express. As they passed the hotel, Charlie tottered out to them with mottled cheeks and lips that trembled, and leaning a moment upon the wheel of their buggy looked miserably into Roddy's eyes.

"Oh, you lucky, lucky devil," he said. "To be leaving this accursed country."

III

THE BOOK OF HIS KINGDOM

I

A YEAR later the sun was setting over Lesson Hill, and already the river valley was filled with purple shadows. Lesson Grange, with a wider view, still caught the sunlight over twenty miles of dale and common and through the great armorial window its last rays flooded the stairway. The wide hall opened out upon a lawn, stretching between cedars, an old lawn rich like satin and for the moment splendid with gold.

Along the front of the house stretched a terrace, broad and flagged, and from it one could see the river flowing solemnly in the valley below.

There was an aroma of tea and roses, and in the cool air a lingering scent of hay and pine-woods.

And the result was an indefinable sense of England and summer and security, an atmosphere of cloistered prosperity and inviolable tradition.

Far down in the valley gleamed a stretch of white roadway. It had been there since the

Roman conquest, and over its wide surface wheels moved easily.

In a soft carriage two passengers were passing it even now.

The old man on the terrace looked down at them through his field glasses which he presently handed to his companion.

"Yes, they are coming," he said.

She looked at them critically.

"Well, he is a big man at any rate," she observed presently.

"So Trevelyan gave us to understand"

"And he looks quite proper. Flannel suit, straw hat, plain ribbon. I cannot see his face."

The old man paced up and down, stopping now and then to shade his eyes and mark the progress of the carriage.

Lady Lucy laughed at his restlessness.

"Why, uncle, you are getting quite excited."

He paused before her.

"No, my dear, not excited. A little agitated, perhaps. I am glad to have Trevelyan back, you see. This year without him has been very trying. I am glad he has come back, and I am glad, too, that Roderick has come with him. Trevelyan is not the man to come with—with——"

"An impossible?"

"Quite so, my dear. I can trust Trevelyan. Yes, I am sure I can trust Trevelyan. Eh, don't you think so?"

She laughed.

"Why, you're doubting him this very minute," she said.

He turned about, and

"Oh, Lucy," he said solemnly, "it is a big responsibility, you know."

"The heir?"

"So much depends on him, the traditions, the work. Will he bear out the traditions? Is he the man for the work? It doesn't greatly matter what he does with this bit of land when I am gone, but our work, Lucy, what of that? Will he be the man to carry out the scheme? Is he the man to redeem his fellows, to throw his heart into my plans and carry out my desires? Oh, so much depends on him, and such men are rare, Lucy. Is he a man? Yes, I cannot help doubting sometimes whether Trevelyan has not been carried away by something inessential." Lady Lucy waved a teaspoon.

"Sit down, uncle, and have another cup. Calm yourself and reflect that at any rate you can send him home again."

Through the great gates, the carriage swung at a round pace, the lodgekeeper touching his

hat respectfully and his children curtseying at the roadside.

Roddy looked at them seriously and bade them good day. It oppressed him, this tacit recognition of superiority. It was as though he were playing a part.

Through this year of travel he had indeed become accustomed to deference, but so far it had only been that accorded by habit to travellers, who pay their way.

But there was something new and individual in this homage, which struck him with a sense of discomfort, even of awe. It was as though he were being taken by the shoulders and ushered into his place by some force invisible, old as the hills and as unchangeable.

And in its hands he felt a child.

And who indeed were these men, that they should bow at his approach?

They drove horses, he supposed, cleaned stables, felled trees, and the like.

Well, so did he.

They worked to live, and dwelt in the strength of what they earned.

And such a life was his.

Why, then, should they touch their hats and run at his behest?

Ah, they were strange problems, these products of civilization and the East, Birth and

Class and Breeding and the rest, and it were better surely to thrust them from his mind.

He looked round with a sigh, his eyes dwelling upon the great trees and the rich colouring of these surrounding pastures.

The wheels grated pleasantly on the gravel, and the park, it would seem, dwelt in a realm of eternal siesta, from which the world, more strenuous, was in perpetual banishment.

Well, it had its charms, this unreal, opulent English life, and it was a strange accident indeed that had called him to share them.

Beside him in the carriage, Trevelyan sat watching him, with half closed eyes. Already, in this short year, Roddy had changed wonderfully; and Trevelyan took no little credit for the metamorphosis.

With infinite discretion, he had led him from one experience to another, from the rough hotels of the Western Rockies, to the various society of the steamer to Japan.

There he had met friends in the legations, and with enormous persuasion had succeeded in getting Roddy into evening dress.

Returning through India they had met many and various acquaintances, had dined in masses and clubs, and attended fêtes galore.

They had dawdled down the Mediterranean and spent golden weeks on the Riviera.

And every month had seen the grave of some Western crudity, the disappearance of some provincial colloquialism.

Until now, unwitting of the change, Roddy had very naturally moved far towards Trevelyan's ideal of gentle deportment. And on this summer afternoon Trevelyan felt that his share of the work was finished, and that now the future lay in Roddy's own unconscious keeping. So he sucked his cigar with a sense of duty done, and wondered idly how the old man would greet their return.

The carriage drew up between the lawn and the terrace, and on the broad steps leading up to the doorway Sir George stood waiting to greet them. He looked very frail and bent, a tottering hidalgo in a velvet jacket.

Roddy could have lifted him in his arms quite easily, and yet there was something in the very gesture of his welcome that was an unmistakable testimony of power, and to Roddy he stood instantly for the very type of knightly tradition.

And so they faced one another, grandfather and grandson, children of such different schools, knit only by the bond of blood. And they looked into each other's eyes, eyes that were very much alike, Roddy's grave and indomitable, Sir George's grave and indomitable, but

with an added gentleness that sprang from older years and a tenderer environment.

Then the old man held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you, Roddy."

"I am glad to see you, sir."

And this from a boy, who had called his father by his Christian name.

Trevelyan smiled to himself. So the centuries had conquered, after all, and the old man, standing for the great past, had won his homage very naturally.

It was Roddy's first surrender to the spirit of the place, and Trevelyan smiled, wondering if Roddy realized the nature of his admission.

And if Roddy found his grandfather the knight of an elder school, and a fit interpreter of the manner grand, so the old man's heart had rejoiced suddenly as he set eyes upon this heir of his, this boy, blood of his blood, bone of his bone.

With his close brown hair and firm, clean-shaven lips and chin, with his cheeks flushed a little beneath his rich mahogany skin, and his blue steady eyes, he was good to look upon, standing here in the pride of his manhood on the steps of his inheritance.

The old man turned his face to the sunset that he might look at him more closely; and doing so, saw that the eyes of him were those of

a man who had warred with nature and faced death, but with the heart of a boy and a spirit simple and straightforward.

They sat down together on the terrace for tea, and presently when Trevelyan and Sir George had retired to consult on business matters, Lady Lucy and Roddy talked long into the twilight.

Roddy was not shy, but conversation had never been his strong point, and often enough his gaze wandered out across the valley, over this scene so strange to him and new—the great undulating park leading down to the river; studded with giant trees, the white road growing grey in the dusk, the opposite hills with their plantations of fir, the tender sky above them and its English stars, the crying of birds in the gardens, the trim lawn and flower beds at their feet.

It was such a picture as dwells in memory and is at once the strength and weakness of Englishmen abroad. Lady Lucy watched his evident enjoyment with a smile. It was true, no doubt, that he ought rather to have been entertaining her, but she was content to watch him—this experiment of her uncle's—and she saw that at present at any rate there was no light of ownership in his eyes.

"It is very lovely, don't you think?" she asked presently.

He looked at her again.

"Yes, I—I beg your pardon, you know. I'm rather a poor companion, but I have never seen anything like this, and it seems to fill one's mind."

"The prairie must be very different."

Roddy nodded.

"I guess it's only my fancy, but all this seems to me to have been built up step by step, through hundreds and hundreds of years, to be old and rich and mature, while the prairie seems to have been struck out once for ever when the world was made, and to have remained everlastingly young. Am I talking nonsense, do you suppose?"

She shook her head.

"Well, it seems to me that here you have conquered nature, and out there nature is still on top, with her storms and fires and frost. And she's always letting us know it."

Lady Lucy smiled.

"I think perhaps you are right," she said. "We are getting rather far away from nature here."

She rose and took up her books.

"I am going in now to write some letters before we dress for dinner. Would you like to stroll through the gardens for a little?"

And Roddy held open the French door as she passed through.

In the corridor she met Trevelyan.

"Well, Lady Lucy?"

"He is a nice boy, Cyril, but there is something in his eyes that frightens me a little. He has got terrible eyes, don't you think?"

Trevelyan laughed.

"Wait till you know him better," he said.

Roddy walked slowly through the gardens, smoking his pipe. Vistas of rose bushes tempted him on every side, and once a peacock strutted across his path between hedges of yew. Strange fragrant flowers nodded tremulously in the dusk, and a gardener's boy, upon whom he came suddenly, looked at him furtively and touched his cap. Life seemed to be closing about him, with magic bonds, to be enticing him he knew not whither. And was this indeed his home, his heritage? He could not imagine himself spending his days here, but for the moment it was not unpleasant as a dream. From these quiet gardens how infinitely distant seemed Carroll and the prairie and the little farm, and which indeed were the ghosts, they or these, since surely both could not be real?

At a keeper's cottage he was suddenly met by three little girls.

He looked down absently into their clear eyes, and they smiled up at him shyly with rosy cheeks, holding out bunches of flowers.

"Are these for me?"

They nodded, looking at one another, laughing.

He took the little bunch in his big hands.

"Why, this is very good of you," he said, smiling down at them. And then one of them stammered out a little speech.

"Us be so glad you've come," they said.

He stooped suddenly and kissed their cheeks, and they fled blushing and laughing into the little cottage.

Late in the evening Sir George took Roddy round the big hall.

They were the last up and the old man carried a candle.

He held it above his head. And once its light fell on a shirt of mail surrounded by a helmet, and, "A Laville wore those at Agincourt," he said.

They crossed the hall. Above the mantelpiece hung a sword.

"And this was carried at Waterloo."

Then he smiled up into Roddy's face.

"We have always been a family of fighters, you see."

"And you?" asked Roddy gravely.

"As well. Different foes perhaps, and fought with other weapons. You will see them soon."

On their way upstairs the light flickered upon a coat of arms and Roddy paused before it.

"Your crest, I guess."

But the old man laid his hand suddenly upon Roddy's shoulder.

"Our crest," he corrected gently, and even Roddy's republican heart stirred at being one with these old warriors.

At his bedroom door they shook hands. "Good night, Roddy," said the old man. "I am glad you have come. I think we shall be friends."

II

II

Riding home from the summer fallow Young Luke communed with himself. His father had taken up another quarter section and Young Luke was to work it. It already contained a shanty, and as it was situated some four miles away it appeared probable that he would have to reside there. And to reside there meant a great deal more loneliness than Young Luke was either accustomed to or desirous of enduring.

And as a consequence, since the land had to be worked, his thoughts of late had turned to matrimony, and turning to matrimony by a perverse freak of circumstance had been somewhat largely filled by Hope.

It was the most perplexing problem that had faced him, and in his heart he had argued the matter a number of times.

His conscience opposed his desire.

"You like her," suggested the tempter, jibbing tactfully at a more forcible expression.

"She is unsaved," said conscience.

"She hasn't a dollar," added prudence.

"She is beautiful," pursued the tempter.

"Her birth," reproached conscience.

"People would talk," submitted prudence.

"She is young and strong and healthy. She would be a good mother," said the tempter.

"She is unsympathetic; she is almost a heathen," said conscience.

"Liza Judd teaches Sunday school and her father is well off," suggested prudence a little irrelevantly. Was ever a man so harassed, pondered Young Luke, and met his mother pursuing an errant cow.

"Where is Hope?" he asked, dallying still with the tempter.

"Ridden off for the mail," said his mother and continued her errand.

Young Luke stabled his team thoughtfully and presently strolled out upon the trail to the post-office.

The prairie lay about him like a dream and temptation stepped softly in the dusk.

As Hope neared the little Icelandic post-office she met Blackett driving out and he pulled up to greet her.

"You're looking very well, Miss Hope."

"Thanks, I'm quite well."

"Work going hard?"

"Not harder than usual."

Then she looked at him half shyly.

"I say, Mr. Blackett, have you heard anythin' of my cousin?"

The phrase sounded odd in Blackett's ears and he looked at her for a moment with puzzled eyes.

"Cousin?" he repeated.

"Roddy Laville."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I had forgotten."

And he stared at her curiously, wondering why she had emphasized the relationship.

He knew the Lukes' present attitude to Roddy. Was Hope also desirous of sharing this second-hand notoriety? Then he abandoned the idea.

"Why, no," he said. "I fancy he never writes letters, does he?"

Hope shook her head.

"I don't know."

Then Blackett leaned forward a little.

"He will come back, you know," he said.

"I don't think so," said Hope.

For in her mind Roddy wore a coronet, now, and a robe, and moved among rich men, with lands, and queenly girls with soft hands and proud voices. He would never come back.

"He will never come back," she said, but Blackett smiled.

"He will soon find out that England is not the place for him."

Hope touched the bronco.

"Good-bye," she said, and rode on to fetch the letters.

In the shadow of the bluff, Young Luke bit a wisp of grass and listened for hoofs on the trail. When they were close he stepped out and stood across the path.

"Hullo, Hope," he said clumsily and laid a hand upon the bridle. He stared up into her face.

Her eyes shone in the twilight and her cheeks were flushed.

"Hullo, Hope. Enjoyed your ride?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You look well on horseback; always did."

She was silent, looking beyond him, impatiently, to the house.

The blue smoke rose lazily from the smudge in the old corral.

Conscience grew weak and made no protest.

"But she is nobody," muttered prudence.

"Look at her," said the tempter, triumphantly.

"I'm goin' to live on the new farm next month."

"Are you?"

Hope felt relieved.

"I guess—I guess it'll be lonely there."

"It's not very far away."

"I'll miss somethin'. Can you guess what I'll miss?"

"No."

"Can't guess? Well, well, perhaps you wouldn't. I'll miss you."

"Miss me?" Hope's cheeks flamed. "Miss me? What do you mean?"

"I guess I love you, Hope. I guess I want to marry you."

"Will you let go the bridle, please?"

"I'm offerin' you a good home."

"I don't want ever to see you again. I told you I hated you. Why do you ask me?"

"Hate me? Hate me? That's plain words."

"It's what I mean. Why don't you marry Liza Judd or Loo Corrie, or some o' them?"

"I guess you're a heap prettier than them, Hope," and coming closer he laid his fingers upon her arm. She could feel his breath upon her hand.

Then she struck him with her whip twice across the cheek, and the red weals leapt out upon it.

He sprang back, but she held up the bronco for a moment.

"Oh, I hate you, I hate you," she said. "An' if they ask you at Sunday school who whipped you, you can tell them, on'y you daren't, you daren't."

When he looked at her across the supper table she stared at his cheek and sat steadily in her chair, but long after, late in the night, she bit the pillow between her teeth lest old man Luke, through the flimsy wall, should wake and hear her sobbing.

III

III

"So you see it has become my life work," said Sir George.

Roddy nodded and proceeded with his luncheon.

The great windows lay open to a noon of sunlight, but the autumn air was crisp.

Roddy was in his riding clothes, ruddy from exercise.

"And the work has grown beyond my hopes and will grow more. It is only a step just now, but it is a step on the right way, on the road to redemption."

The old man laid down his newspaper and looked seriously at his grandson, looked seriously with the eyes of a dreamer.

"You must spend some time in town soon, Roddy, and look into it," he said.

"I should like to," said Roddy, applying himself to the pie before him.

"You have been riding?"

"Since breakfast."

"You are getting used to our English life."

"Why, yes, I suppose I must be."

"And you like it?"

"It's great." Roddy stretched himself luxuriously and looked across the table.

"It's great, sir, only it still seems like a—a sort of a dream, you know."

Sir George smiled. "You'll outlive that," he said. "And after all, dreams have their place in life, but I want you to see London, Roddy, and the Institute."

Roddy rose leisurely and lit his pipe.

"I'll go to-day," he said.

But Sir George shook his head.

"The country is too good just now," he smiled. "Take your time and enjoy yourself in your own way."

Then Roddy came round to him and looked down into his eyes.

"You are very good to me," he said. "And just now I don't seem quite to have got the hang of things. Some day I guess I'll wake up."

Some day?

Sir George looked at him. Some day this young giant would be master here.

Some day the men and women of to-morrow would watch him with observant eyes, would look upon his wealth and his work. Some day he would be in his country's councils. Some day he would stand, please God, at the helm of

enterprise and reform, would bear the burdens of the future on those big shoulders of his. Ah some day, some day.

But he was silent, for the days were not yet ripe for calling Roddy to his life work. So he rounded his thoughts lightly and, "Some day you will be the lord of this little manor," he said, "and you will marry and——"

"Marry?"

Roddy stared at him slowly.

Marry?

The words fell strangely upon his thoughts, for whom indeed could he ever marry but Hope, and what part had she in this strange life he was leading?

Marry?

Sir George smiled at the trouble, sprung suddenly into his eyes.

"Surely not a very great hardship," he suggested.

But Roddy was silent, trying to piece Hope into this dreamland about him, trying with the foreknowledge of failure already in his heart.

For he knew it could never be and loved her the better for it.

And now, though she had never been far from his thoughts, she came back to him from that new world that was the old, came back with appealing arms. And it dawned upon his mind

for the first time that there was coming upon him a day of decision, and what manner of choice was it that lay before him?

And then he remembered that he could not even guess whether she loved him and he laughed, but took his way thoughtfully across the gardens.

In these few weeks he had become recognized throughout the country as the proper heir to Lesson and the grandson of Sir George's fondest hopes.

A succession of festivities had served to emphasize this feeling, and the manner in which Roddy had yielded to social obligations had crowned the belief with assurance.

To Roddy himself these days had passed like a dream, like a pageant, of which he was but a lay figure, albeit by stress of circumstance a prominent one.

He had talked to men and women who had accepted him as one of themselves, a good fellow, if a silent, and now on this autumn afternoon found himself at last on a river bank that was practically his own domain.

It was all very strange, and in the rush of these long weeks it almost seemed as though his life had known no other side.

He unlocked the boat-house, and dropping into one of the boats, paddled leisurely out into

the stream where he drifted down into the shadow of the opposite woods.

Looking up through the tree trunks darkening into distance, he felt tempted to find his way amongst them; and were they not potentially his?

Fastening the boat to a bending willow he turned into a pathway, flecked with sunlight, but leading into dim recesses.

These dreaming English woods were wonderfully pleasant, full of a sweet illusion and well in harmony with his present mood. Occasional bright eyes peeped at him from stem and brake, but they were not human and no footsteps but his own fell upon the pathway. He walked slowly and for some distance, wondering if anything could make life real in this atmosphere of dreams until at last a familiar sound struck his ears. He paused a moment to gather its direction, and then held out towards it. And presently as he approached a clearing he saw some men at work with axe and saw, and when he came up to them they touched their caps.

It was obvious that they knew who he was, and for a while he stood looking at their work.

Then he bent down and picked up an axe, running his fingers down the shaft. It was of an unaccustomed shape, but as his hands tightened upon it memory and a sudden desire

for labour came upon him. The men watched him curiously as he slowly laid aside his coat.

As he rolled up his sleeves he felt half ashamed, for in these past months his arms had grown strangely white. Then he swung the axe and the blade bit deep into a standing tree-trunk. Swinging easily, only the great chips flying out and the clean deepening cut, told of the power with which he struck. In a minute or two, shifting his grip upon the shaft, he cut left-handedly, without leaving his tracks, a trick caught from the Canadian lumbermen, which brought a quick admiration into the eyes of these English foresters. Presently the great tree cracked and groaned, and with a stroke or two tottered and fell, its butt riding easily over the stump, tapered to a clean edge, with white sides that might have been cut by a plane.

The men crowded round him with an honest praise that was sweeter to Roddy than a thousand tributes to his accident of birth.

The sweat stood upon his forehead, his muscles had grown tense and satisfied, and his face was glad. But at the new light in his eyes the men about him were puzzled.

And indeed how could they tell that this brown-cheeked giant had suddenly awakened from sleep, in a strange land, come suddenly to himself, a dreamer roused at the call of life?

Yet this was the case and Roddy strode down among the trees, filled with a world of self-reproach.

For he had been all too far on the road to forgetfulness, and to his simple creed the ring of an axe had come as the call of God.

And what had he been about to do—to join the ranks of leisure, to forsake the old fierce joys for some new and soft existence? He was not sure of himself.

Why had he let himself drift thus dangerously away from life, from the real bitter peaceful life that had once been his and must assuredly be so again?

Already he had begun to see that a choice must come. It had seemed to be a choice between this new life on the one hand with its ease and homage, and Hope upon the other.

And now it was clear that the choice was a wider one than this. It was a decision between the new and the old, between labour and luxury, between the simplicity of the prairie and its problems, and all the complex machinery of this strange English life that had rolled in the channels of the centuries.

And it was too clear that every week was building its barriers about him, and that he must choose speedily and look to it lest he should do anyone a wrong. And with these

thoughts came the picture of his land in ashes, rented now to Blackett, but awaiting his return next year.

He contrasted it with these fair woods, the broad river and the great house yonder in the sunlight. It was going to be a hard choice, whose day was coming so speedily upon him.

He was going at great strides now down the pathway, keeping pace with his thoughts, and would have overpassed his boat had he not suddenly encountered a new face upon his way.

He pulled up abruptly, and stared for the moment into a pair of brown eyes.

Something in them seemed familiar, and they too would seem to remember.

And he half raised his hat. She smiled.

"We have been introduced, you know," she said. He bowed.

"But I know you have forgotten me."

"Only your name. I know your face quite well."

"We met at Lady Murray's garden party. I am Ethel Moore."

"And yet I know you better than that, though I can't think how."

She shook her head and laughed.

"It's impossible. And—I have never been in Canada."

Canada—that was the link, but how had it been forged?

Roddy could not remember, and groping in his mind, continued to talk to her.

"That is your misfortune," he said. "It's the finest country in the world. I was thinking so right now, when I nearly collided with you."

She laughed.

"You looked as if you were bound there by the next boat."

Roddy looked at her seriously.

"Well, I don't know if that's far wrong," he said.

She looked puzzled.

"But you have only just come back."

"I have been away a year."

"That isn't very long."

"Long enough to spoil a man."

"You are a Manitoban?"

"Yes."

They were standing by the willow tree and she looked down at the boat.

"You are wanting to cross?" divined Roddy.

"Oh, thank you, yes. I live over there." In the shadow of the little church was an old house, covered with creepers, surrounded by a small garden, neatly railed about.

"At the rectory?"

She nodded.

"Since four years ago. We used to live next door till father died. I am a governess." She spoke a little defiantly and Roddy began to like her. She seemed easy and natural, and her gentle birth was obvious. With his mind full of Hope he could not help contrasting the two, this English girl with her delicate colouring, her self-possession and refinement, and Hope, the child of nature, with her untamed grace and this strange phenomenon of birth that could make him the friend of both.

The autumn evening was growing chilly, and as the boat's nose ran in among the reeds, his companion shivered a little.

"You are cold I guess," said Roddy. "You must hurry home."

But she stood for a moment undecided.

"I suppose—I suppose you cannot know a Mr. West," she said, looking at him seriously.

"West—Charlie West? Why, yes, of course I do."

And in a moment Roddy found what he had wanted. Here was the reality of a picture he had often seen in the little shanty next his own.

"Why, yes," he said again. "I know him very well."

"Then, Mr. Laville, would you care—would you mind coming with me to the rectory? His father and mother live there. They would be

so glad. It would comfort them. They miss him so much. It would be the next best thing to seeing him, if they could talk to you, who have seen him so recently."

Her brown eyes were looking him honestly in the face, and as she pleaded the colour in her cheeks had heightened.

Roddy hesitated a moment; then he guided the boat back into its house and locked the door.

"I should like to come," he said.

When they got back to the house the curtains were drawn, and in the little drawing room a fire was glowing in the grate and a lamp burned softly upon one of the tables.

And as they entered, two white-haired persons rose to greet him, looking at him with some surprise, but coming forward with gentle courtesy to shake his hand.

"Of course you are known to us by sight, Mr. Laville," said the rector, "although you are not one of our parishioners. It is good of you to have come to see us."

"Mr. Laville has come to tell you about Charlie," said Ethel, and Roddy could not but smile, despite himself, at the sudden change in their demeanour towards him.

"About Charlie?"

The faces, looking anxiously into his, had

been worn and tired, but now they were illumined like those of watchers, whose vigil has not been vain.

They both spoke at once with eager lips, coming close to him; and at the light in their eyes Roddy suddenly wished himself worlds away, for it was abundantly evident that their Canadian exile was the light and hope of this little Berkshire home.

"About Charlie?"

Oh, he must sit down and tell them all he knew, draw his chair up to the fire, and Ethel would bring him some tea.

"About Charlie?"

How could they thank him enough for coming down to tell them of their boy?

And first, was he well, was he happy?

For a minute or two Roddy stared at them in silence, collecting his thoughts, and realizing suddenly that the whole happiness of this little home had been thrust into his keeping to seal or shatter.

Then the little drawing room, decked with trinkets, faded from his view and he saw only a shanty, charred and destitute, saw two despairing eyes and a figure debauched and miserable reeling down a western street.

And going back across the months, saw this same son of theirs, irresponsible, débonnair, with

Hope upon his arm. He came back to the present with an effort, knowing that three people hung upon his words; and for the first time in his life felt that there were eyes upon him that he dared not face.

"Yes, his health seemed all right."

"And he was happy?"

Roddy was silent. What had he told them of his life, this son of their love?

"Life is a bit hard out there sometimes."

"Oh, yes, we know. We wonder he has stood it so well, and he is doing so splendidly."

Roddy stared into the fire. He preferred to be told about Charlie, to hear of him from these his worshippers.

"And only last year he had the best crop that he had ever had." They could not quite keep the pride from their voices, and looked at him with shining eyes.

"The wheat promised well," said Roddy.

"And the papers said it had been a record year."

"Yes, it was a record year."

"And prices had been good."

"They were certainly better."

"He was not overworking, you think?"

"No, I think not."

They looked at one another gladly.

"Ah, that is reassuring. He has not written

much this year, and we have thought it a sign of his prosperity, of increasing duties, you know."

They beamed.

"No news is good news."

Roddy moved uneasily in his chair and shifted his gaze from the fire to the table. Upon it stood a photo of Charlie.

He looked back into the fire.

"Yes," he muttered. "You are quite right. It's often good news."

"You see," began the old man. He looked inquiringly at his wife and she smiled back and nodded. "You see, Mr. Laville, we were so glad to be able to help him to buy all that new land and good machinery. We could not have done any more for him, and it is indeed a comfort to hear of his success—indeed a comfort."

He closed his eyes a moment, and Roddy, looking at him quickly, wondered if he were thanking God.

"A little capital may be a great help," he said.

"You cannot think how we are longing to see him again. Dear boy, it was always his wish to go abroad and he has been so good and steady."

"You must have missed him."

"Oh, we have. Nobody knows how much."

"He will be glad to see you again."

"And you think he may soon return, be able to leave a manager over his affairs for a little while, and come back for a real holiday?"

"Some day, perhaps, if not just yet. It is hard to get away, you know."

"Of course we have no idea of the life out there."

"Perhaps it is as well."

They smiled at him.

"Yes, we have often thought that. It might make us more anxious about Charlie's success."

"Yes."

Roddy rose suddenly.

"I am sorry. I must be going," he said. "I —I am glad to have seen you."

They pressed about him gratefully.

"Oh, Mr. Laville, how shall we thank you? We shall never forget your visit, and the way you have cheered us, and your great kindness, and all your——"

"Don't thank me," said Roddy, and looked over their heads. "Don't thank me. Good night."

"Good night. Good night. God bless you."

But Ethel brought him to the gate and lingered there a moment.

"Mr. Laville?"

"Yes."

"Did you—know him well?"

"Yes."

"Then I think—I think you haven't told them very much."

Roddy looked at her dumbly, and in her eyes and rising colour saw that he had surprised a secret. And who was he to be thus trampling these sacred places of another man's history?

"I think you have been hiding something."

Roddy took her hand.

"I am beginning to be sorry I met you," he said, and saw tears in her eyes. But they were brave eyes and looked at him fearlessly.

"You won't tell me?"

"We have a saying in Manitoba, that when an Englishman loses all his money he begins to do well."

"He has been unfortunate?"

Roddy looked back at the little house, with its glowing windows, and tender garden. Then his eyes came back to those before him.

"But I think he will prosper," he said.

IV

IV

Midway between the East End's widest thoroughfare and the London docks, in a road that leads sinuously to the river, many-windowed, well lit and luxurious, stood the Laville Institute.

Its turreted roof soared commandingly above the huddled tenements, its searchlight blazed over the pitiful streets with a clear and penetrating beam, complacent and judicial and compassionate.

Open day and night, its broad steps led into a hall that would have done credit to a Mayfair club.

Conducted on ecclesiastical principles, it stood for the redemption of the masses, morally, socially, artistically, and physically.

Its library was large and select; its classes included instruction in mathematics, wood carving, chemistry, and gymnastics; its billiard tables were excellent, and though cards were forbidden, yet bagatelle, draughts, and chess might be played at any time between the hours of ten and ten.

Curates from neighbouring churches afforded opportunities for religious and moral elevation, and ladies from the West End brought fruit and flowers and held classes for poker work and etching.

Sir George had provided the necessary capital, had been well backed by the philanthropic section of society, and was ably assisted by Trevelyan, to whom indeed the conception and perfection of the institute were largely due.

And if the East End rolled by on its iniquitous way untouched, brushing the lions at the gateway with sordid elbows and refusing to be escorted to higher things, it was not for want of the willing help of the better classes or the unstinted efforts of the established clergy.

Nevertheless Trevelyan sat in his private room, with his tea untasted, staring moodily into the fire, as he had done for an hour past.

Presently the door opened and Lady Lucy came in. She crossed to the fireplace and stood looking down at him.

They were old friends, these two, and kept no secrets.

"Dreaming, Cyril?"

"Thinking, worrying a bit. I am afraid, even desponding."

"And why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know. Things

are no worse to-day than they have been ever since, since the first flush died away, you know."

She tapped her foot upon the fender.

"Six men listening to the Reverend Lucien, five in the library, two in the billiard room, and a few boys here and there?" she asked.

He nodded.

"And the men, Lucy, the splendid animals, with their passions and possibilities, outside and unredeemed; for whom do we reach but the merest fringe of characterless parasites, who have been through the hands of a dozen such places as this?"

"Ah, but you are feeling tired to-night, and all such work must grow slowly. They will come in time to believe in you, the men you want."

"In time—in time? And how much time have we, Sir George and I?"

Then Roddy came in and seated himself with a sigh.

They both looked towards him, and Lady Lucy smiled.

"Why, surely you are not depressed?" she asked.

Roddy laughed.

"Not exactly," he said. "But this London of yours is pretty appalling. I had no idea there were such places in the world as some I have

seen this afternoon, or such people, God help them."

"You think so?"

Trevelyan was looking at him eagerly, the languor vanished from his face, and the old enthusiasm came back in his eyes.

"You had never dreamed there were such people, such places?"

"Never."

"And what do you think of a work that is meant to lift them up, re-create them, make them men?"

Roddy looked at him gravely.

"I should say it was the best work on earth almost."

"Then listen," said Trevelyan. "There was a man to whom fortune was kind, whose investments prospered, and who acquired great wealth. And one day he took the trouble to inquire into the way of life of those who were toiling to build up his estate. And he spent a long time in learning many lessons and made a resolve, which at last became the ruling idea of his life."

"Well?" asked Roddy.

"And this is the result. This is Sir George's fight to redeem these toilers, and these are his weapons. He has wanted you to see them."

"And you succeed?"

Trevelyan was on his feet now and talking eagerly.

"Succeed? Why, not yet, but we mean to, we are going to, in the days to come."

Roddy nodded.

"That's good, splendid."

"But Roddy——"

"Yes?"

"There is one thing needful."

"Well?"

"We must have a man to take the helm, to be the leader of the future, a man who is young and strong and hopeful, whom other men will trust."

Roddy was silent, looking from one to the other.

"Well?" he asked again.

Then Trevelyan put both hands upon his shoulders, looking him in the face.

"Thou art the man," he said.

He was looking at him with triumphant eyes. Step by step for a long year he had prepared the way for this minute and stood now, confessed, with the certainty of attainment written in his face.

And Roddy was conscious that Lady Lucy was regarding him curiously from her position by the mantelpiece.

He could hear the clock ticking and a waggon rumbling in the road outside. He looked long into Trevelyan's eyes, long enough to see the presage of defeat creep into them.

Then he disengaged himself from the hands upon his shoulders and picked up his hat.

"I am sorry," he said.

And outside in the crowded streets he knew that the moment of his choice had come.

So this was the work, the scheme, the ideal of these two men, and for this he had been sought out, and upon him they had built their hopes.

He looked at the men and women about him, above whom he stood shoulder high; and what faces they were, hurrying joylessly down these grim thoroughfares!

This was the other side of his land of dreams. These were the rabble in the wake of the pageant, and for their betterance Sir George and Trevelyan spent money and labour and prayer. Well, it was a good work, and now they were calling upon him to share it.

It was a good work, the sort of work God must love, and yet it found him strangely unenthusiastic.

Losing thought of direction, he traversed street after street, some flaunting their poverty frankly in his face, the majority silent and sordid.

There seemed no end to them; but he set his teeth and resolved to outstrip them.

And at last he struck out into a green expanse, leading upwards and away from town. The grass was pleasant to his feet, even in the dark, and he was glad to be climbing. And presently at the summit of the hill he paused. He seemed to have come a long way north, and beyond him lay only a dim outline of hills and trees.

At his feet, London, half in mist, lay gleaming like a city of stars, but he had threaded its midst and knew that the jewelry was false.

The wind was blowing a gale from the west, out of a clear sky, and he stood poised against it, filling his lungs with its strength.

And so for awhile he waited, London with its problems at his feet; but the West, at his right hand, with a call that would not be denied.

Yet it was hard in these strange ways to tell the right one certainly.

And though in his mind the issue of his choice had never been really in doubt, it became now solemn and irrevocable.

He turned thoughtfully down the hill. Then a pair of lovers, talking softly, met him on the path. In a friendly human way they seemed to say "yes" to his decision, and as he passed them he grew suddenly light of heart.

Later in the evening he met Trevelyan in the great drawing-room of Sir George's London house. The room was crowded, filled with the gleam of silk and shirtfront and the murmur of conversation.

Roddy had sought him ever since he returned, haunted by his disappointed eyes. He was very repentant now and wished to make amends.

Trevelyan came to meet him and side by side the two made their way towards the balcony.

Although it was winter, the day had been warm and the window was standing ajar. And as they passed through the room, Roddy with his big shoulders and the ploughman's gait that could never be quite disguised, became the centre of many eyes, and Trevelyan could read admiration in most of them.

For by contrast to the paler faces about him he would seem to be a very child of the sun, and through the languorous drawing-room his stride came as a breath of the open plains.

There seemed to be a whisper abroad, and in Trevelyan's ear.

"Lo, this is a man," it said.

And he felt suddenly that he could not let him go, this heir of the Lavilles, who might stand for so much in the future of his country and its capital. And leaning on the balcony,

"Hark," he said.

Roddy listened.

"It's only the roar of London," he murmured. But Trevelyan looked at him with bright eyes.

"No, it is more than that," he said. "It is the pulse of the world's heart. It is full of the drums of battle. It is a challenge to us men, to you and me, to go out and join in the strife. You will not turn back?"

But Roddy faced him slowly, and laying his hand upon Trevelyan's shoulder,—

"See here," he said, "you and I are different, different from the very root of matters, and your life is not for me.

"To you, this London of yours, with its civilization and culture, is the centre of things. This is where you find it best worth while to live. But to me the plains are all I want, and I must get back to them."

"But the work, Roddy, and the responsibility. Have you never thought of the responsibility?"

"The dead must bury their dead."

"The dead?"

"You see what I mean. You here are the top of the tree of your civilization; those folk down there are its dregs, but you are both its products.

"And it's your duty to make things right if you

can. But I belong out there. It's your business to set right, but it's mine to start right.

"It's your business to reform, but it's mine to build.

"I'm sorry. I have been dreaming about here too long. I ought to have got back months ago. I guess perhaps I ought never to have come, except maybe that it may help me to build.

"No, you can't persuade me; our ways are bound to be different, you see. God made them so, I guess, and I must get back to mine."

"But as heir of the Lavilles?"

Roddy smiled.

"Wasn't there once a Laville who set sail from Normandy to fight his way in a new country?"

Trevelyan was silent. Then after a long time he held out his hand.

"I suppose you are right, Roddy," he said, "I suppose you are right."

The same evening he wrote a long letter to Sir George, who read it and tore it slowly to fragments, staring out of the window across the park, clouded to-day and barren of leaves.

He was growing old and tired and the burden of work lay heavily on his shoulders. And he had built very much upon this heir of his, come out of the West, this giant grandson sent to him in the twilight of life.

The boy had seemed fit for the work, splendidly fit, and he had been more than content. And indeed the other side of the question had never occurred to him, that Roddy would decline the mission and the fortune, even if he must perforce inherit the acres. And yet this had come about, and something seemed suddenly wiped out of his life. The day looked grey and sombre, and the future that must now be left in other hands, seemed inglorious.

He had not thought in these few weeks to have leant so heavily upon Roddy. He went out into the great hall, pacing up and down, under the eyes of the old Lavilles.

It seemed hard that heaven should have sent him such an heir and thus unaccountably snatched his hopes away.

And the old Lavilles, looking solemnly down from their coats of armour, held out no consolation to his heart.

There came a sound of wheels upon the gravel outside, and the old man paused.

Then as Roddy came in, he drew himself up and held out his hand.

"So you have grown tired of town?" he asked.

Roddy was silent.

"I—had hoped you might have thrown your heart into the work."

"I am sorry."

"Trevelyan has written to me. You have talked it over. You will not help us?"

"I am sorry. I have been here too long. I don't know why I came. I have been——"

The old man held up his hand.

"I understand all that," he said, and Roddy flushed. "Your visit has been a pleasure to me. You have been welcome. When do you return?"

"To-morrow."

"From Liverpool?"

"Yes."

"You are going back to London to-night I suppose."

Roddy nodded.

They were fighters, the old Lavilles, and they looked down from the walls.

The old man might have been speeding the acquaintance of an hour.

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Roddy. Perhaps we may not meet again?"

Roddy stared at him. What could he say? He took the outstretched hand.

"Good-bye, sir. I have been proud to know you."

And the last he saw of Trevelyan was on the steps of the Dorrington Club, eager and wistful.

Roddy waved his hand from the cab. And

as they steamed out of St. Pancras he lowered the carriage window.

His eyes were upon disappearing London, but the fresh wind came to him as a message from the prairie. And leaning back in the carriage he sighed contentedly.

V

V

THE afternoon was beginning to grow grey and there were shadows in the kitchen.

The Lukes were all away at a neighbouring festivity, and only Hope remained to keep the house.

Charlie stood looking down into her eyes.

He had just come from the trail, and his fur coat was powdered with frost. His cutter was outside, the pony hitched loosely to the well-post.

From the stoop of his shoulders he would seem to have been pleading, and Hope, leaning back, was looking at him with eyes half-frightened.

They were not such glad eyes as those of a year ago, and there was more knowledge in them.

She stood against the wall, her open hands pressed upon it on either side, and she seemed to have caught her breath.

"I can't," she said, "I can't."

"Oh, and why not? Why not?"

He was poor now, cutting wood for his living;

and life mattered very little to him, so that he might pluck what joys he found upon the way.

"Why not?"

There was something of the old caress in his voice.

"Why not?"

And indeed, why not? He had been good to her, this Englishman; he had that in him which was different from these Canadians who surrounded her and shrugged their shoulders. He had told her she was pretty and had been tender to her.

Then why not?

And Roddy was far away, and had not written, and by all accounts had become a great man in his own country. He would never come back.

And why was she thinking of Roddy all so suddenly, and what indeed had he to do with the way of her life? Why, very little since those old days that were so hard to believe in now. Yet her cheeks flushed and she looked down at the shabby floor.

"I can't," she said again.

Charlie took a step towards her and laid his hand upon her arm. It was a strong young arm and resisted him, and it was pleasant to overcome it. He held her hand.

"We could be very happy. Why delay?"

She thought of the slow winter months, the

old round of toil, the little pleasure that came to her in these long empty years. And she was young and made surely for enjoyment.

"Come now," said Charlie, and took her other hand. "Come now. It is not far to go. It is very easy."

She escaped his eyes, looking round the shanty, but there was none to tell her nay; for old John Wesley was looking in another direction, and the big Bible lay covered with a cloth. Through the window stretched the plains, snow-clad and solitary.

"Come now," said Charlie, and bent closer.

So they stood for a minute.

Then he left her hands and threw her cloak about her shoulders.

She was very pale, but he put his hand upon her lips and gathered her to his side.

"Who shall hinder us?" he asked.

VI

VI

THERE are days in life when events would seem to march with one accord, working out an appointed end, with no apparent effort at concealment. And on such a day, Roddy left the train at Carroll, with the smell of the frost in his nostrils, and his eyes satisfied at last with the great grey plains about him.

He stretched himself, glad to be alive, and glad to be back in Manitoba on this winter day. In his fur coat, he stepped out into the yard, intending to go across to the livery stable; but on the way met Blackett, seated on empty bobsleighs and about to drive out of town.

He pulled up, staring at Roddy in some amazement.

Roddy laughed and held out a hand to him.

"Come back, you see. Your England couldn't hold me."

They shook hands, and Blackett stood twirling the reins in his hand, and looking at Roddy.

He guessed at something of the history that lay behind this sudden return, and found it not displeasing.

"So you got tired of it. And what of the schemes?"

Roddy shook his head.

"Give me this," he said, and looked down the frozen street and beyond.

"Where are you driving?" he asked presently.

"To the bush. Camping there just now. Will you come?"

Roddy nodded, the desire to be rid of towns strong within him, and they drove out upon the trail.

The snow lay in white drifts on either side. The sky was blue and pale, but on the horizons grew blurred and grey.

"You've been having rough weather, I guess," he said.

Blackett nodded.

"It has been a bad month in the open," he replied, and laid his whip about the horse's flanks.

Half an hour later he pulled up.

Carroll lay behind them, a speck on the plains.

"I think we had better walk a bit," he said, and for a while they trudged in the horse's wake.

"It's cold," said Roddy.

Blackett looked at the sky.

"It's a nasty day altogether," he said. "It's lucky there's not a wind, Roddy."

Roddy nodded.

The feel of the snow was good after London streets and sheltered English lanes.

It was the country for a man, this, the country for hot blood and a clear eye.

He thrust his hands deeper into his coat pockets and strode with rising spirits.

Presently he turned gravely to Blackett:

"It's good to be back, eh?" he asked.

Blackett smiled.

They were comrades in their love for the plains.

"They all come back," he said.

Roddy filled his chest.

"A fellow can breathe here," he said. "A fellow can breathe here without feeling he's sort of borrowing somebody else's air."

Along the southern horizon lay a ribbon of bush, dark between the grey of the sky and the grey of the snow.

Presently they mounted the sleighs again and Blackett put the horses at a gallop.

The black strip grew bigger and more clearly defined, and against the background of bush, outpost trunks of stunted oaks and frozen poplars began to assert themselves.

"Where's the camp?" asked Roddy.

"Mine? Down there in the dry bush."

Blackett pointed with his whip.

"Anyone else in with you?"

"Two of the Luke boys, half a mile beyond, an' West, about a mile this side."

"West?"

"Yes, chopping cord wood for his food and whiskey."

"He's not married?"

Blackett stared.

"Married? Good Lord, no," he laughed.

Roddy was silent. Then,

"Show me his shanty," he said.

As they neared the bush the trail grew harder, since it was the chief road into the timber. On either side of it, stumps, half buried, proclaimed that they were leaving the open prairie.

Grey recesses glimmered about them and serried arrays of frozen tree trunks stretched monotonously on either side, blending further back into a grey indistinctness.

Three foxes at the trail side looked at them doubtfully, ready for flight, and once an old timber wolf, lurking among the trees, stole deeper into shadow.

The green poplars gave place now to a melancholy world of dry wood, stretching death-like into the sky above them—old trees that a dozen fires had left naked and desolate. It was warmer, here in the bush, but the silence was as profound, and the ring of the runners echoed emptily about them. Then a clearing appeared

at their left, and beyond it a little shack, put roughly together, and apparently deserted.

"That's West's," said Blackett, and Roddy noted its position.

A mile further on they drew up at a similar building, but one of greater comfort and built with more care.

Roddy looked at it approvingly.

"You've done yourself well, Blackett."

"Yes, I'm pretty comfortable and getting quite a lot of wood out, and it's snug living here in this weather, though it's a bit lonely when the teams have gone out."

"Any teams in to-day?"

Blackett shook his head.

"Too cold," he said.

Roddy went in, and they had some tea; and since Roddy had not lunched, Blackett gave him a loaf and some cold pork.

Roddy sat on a stool, cutting off portions of the provisions with his clasp knife.

"By Jove, that's a good meal," he said at last, handing back a remnant of the bread pathetic in bereavement. "The best meal I've had for a year, Blackett. 'Tis really."

Blackett laughed.

"I thought you would come back," he said, and they sat for a while, talking of the farm and the summer's crop.

Then Roddy rose to his feet.

"You'll forgive my going?"

"Going? You'll stop the night surely?"

Roddy shook his head.

"I must get back to the old place," he said. "I've made up my mind to sleep there to-night." And he was obdurate. Blackett rose to his feet.

"Have your own way," he said. "I'll drive you there."

But Roddy forbade him.

"No, I want to walk," he said. "It's only ten miles an' I'll get there soon after dark; an' I want—I want to have a talk with West before I go."

Blackett held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Roddy. I am glad you have come back."

Roddy followed the trail until he reached the first clearing, where Charlie's shack had stood, and crossing it came to the door.

The spot was wrapped in silence, and in the waning light looked strangely cheerless.

The door yielded to his hand. He stepped into the shanty. There was no window, and in its absolute shadow only the faint reek of tobacco came to Roddy's senses. Then as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he saw that the stove was cold, and contained white ashes.

In the frying pan was some frozen fat, and a crust of bread lay on the earth floor.

A saw hung upon the wall and a couple of axes were leaning up in one corner. The bed was disordered, and upon the table lay the remnants of a meal.

Inside the door was a pail of water with a covering of ice upon it.

Roddy went out and looked into the stable. This, too, was empty, save for a half used bag of oats and a rough pile of hay.

It was sod roofed and banked with manure, and over the whole the unbroken stillness brooded like a burden. Through the trees behind the shanty glimmered a trail, striking apparently, by a shorter route, into the prairie beyond; and this Roddy took, glad to have left these sombre buildings behind him. The track threaded sinuously among the trees and Roddy could see upon it the traces of a single horse between the runners of a cutter.

The afternoon was growing dim now and he walked fast, anxious to be out upon the plains and on his way home.

The trees grew thinner about him, gathering themselves presently into little clumps with wide spaces of snow between them. Once he stumbled upon a hidden stump that the runners had dodged, but soon was beyond the boundary

of bush and upon a trail that would seem to be leading him right.

The blue had died out of the sky, which was now a cup of grey, blending with these great spaces of snow, and through the hush of the frost no sound fell upon his ears.

The cold had deepened with the approach of dusk till the plains lay crushed in its grip and Roddy striding over the snow seemed alone in the gift of life.

But through this wilderness he trod with a light heart, humming an old song and every step bringing him nearer to home and Hope.

He wondered why he had ever gone away and how, for a moment, that other life had seemed good in his eyes, and knew that at last he was set firmly in the path that was right. For now he was at home, with never a chimney between himself and Hudson's Bay, at home in the arms of this great grim mother of his, greeting him with so frosty an embrace.

The light faded and then a sudden pain fell upon his lips and forehead, as though one had pressed cold steel softly among the finest endings of his nerves. It came swiftly and lasted but a moment, and Roddy knew it was only the faintest ripple of wind, creeping lazily down the sky.

But it brought him back to the trail and the

moment, and he looked about him keenly with observant eyes.

The plains had been a dead grey, streaked only by pallid drifts, but now the snow was rising in little clouds, like puffs of smoke, tossing up and dying away.

He quickened his stride, and then for the first time saw a cutter far down the trail, crawling towards him.

And this trail led only to Charlie's shanty.

It was a cold evening to be out for a drive, and Roddy wondered what urgent business had taken him from the bush on such a day as this.

And, again, this relentless hand playing softly among his nerves. He pulled his cap closer about his eyes and ears, and swung on, and the cutter grew clearer to his vision; grew clearer until he saw that the driver was not alone.

Who then was his companion on so bitter a trail?

He could only see as yet two huddled fur-clad figures, and a lean horse floundering heavily, but already some presage of misfortune came upon his spirit like sorrow.

The song died from his lips and his eyes grew hard. Then England and civilization became as though they were not, and their graces fell away from him. For the drama before him was old ere they were born, and was to be played

now among the frost and silence that had marked the beginning of time.

So they met at last, and for a moment they regarded him unwittingly.

Then he pulled off his cap, and they recognized him, Hope with cheeks that grew suddenly red and desperately white, and Charlie with a pitiful gaiety that died quickly from his eyes.

And the trail led only to one shanty, and it was evening.

Nor were any words needed to spell out this story that lay plain to Roddy's gaze, that indeed he had guessed already. And what lie was there but would meet with mockery from the great stillness that surrounded them?

And so they stood facing one another, Roddy's hand upon the bridle, and his eyes upon Hope, and Charlie staring dumbly at Roddy and none of them speaking, and only the wind breaking the silence with its heraldings of storm.

Then Roddy became glad because God had given him strength so that he could crush this man before him.

But his eyes never left Hope's face.

"Well?" he asked at last.

She shrank back into the seat of the cutter, among the surrounding furs, looking at him with eyes that were afraid.

But they were frank eyes still, and confessed both sin and love.

"Where are you going?"

"Where are you going?" he repeated, and they looked at him fearfully, standing there before them, at the gates of his kingdom, with eyes that would not be denied.

Charlie tried to speak, but Roddy for the first time looked him full in the face, and the words were wiped from his lips.

A sudden passion to kill him mounted into Roddy's heart, and then the storm closed about them with a shout, with a wind that came up from the deepest fastnesses of frost, and lashed the snow into a fog before their eyes.

Roddy bent down over Hope.

"Will you come?" he said, "Will you come? There is not much time. Will you come?"

Then she held out her hands, and neither sobbed nor fainted, but looked at him now without fear, and

"Take me, Roddy," she said.

So he lifted her from the cutter and laid his arm about her, and they faced the darkness.

And what if ten thousand blizzards swept the plain?

For Roddy knew that he had come at last to his kingdom and held heaven in his arms.

The roar of the wind forbade speech, but it

was enough to feel her yielded to his side, to be her tower against the night. And in the same moment he felt, and knew also that she felt, a sudden sense of that bodily congruity, which is love's first foundation. For here to-night they were one, children of the same life, the same outlook, the same plains. England had been well enough, but here he was face to face with an experience that England could never have given him, combating the currents that lay beneath existence, that the old world skimmed and was not called upon to battle.

And as they went his spirits rose to their supremest conflict.

For the primal passions were out to-night, murder and frost and death.

He looked over his shoulder.

The cutter, backed into a drift by the frightened horse, lay broken and twisted, soon to be buried, and Charlie slunk behind them through the storm, loth to be left alone.

And Roddy laughed and knew that whatever the issue might be, love was abroad in the fight and would not brook defeat.

He drew Hope closer against him, sheltering her, as much as might be, from the terror of the wind.

The snow dashed in his face, but he shook it from his eyes, and held on, strong and confident.

And presently, as he was sure they would, they stumbled upon a fence; and, stooping down, he laid his hand upon the wire. The chances were that in time it would lead them to some building, and he bent his lips to Hope's ear and encouraged her.

Foot by foot they crept along the fence, pausing at each post for breath and to give Hope a snatched moment of rest.

Behind them, through gaps in the mist, they caught occasional glimpses of Charlie, looming indistinctly, crawling in their tracks.

And then a time came when he was blotted out, and crept no more into view, and Hope leaned heavily upon Roddy.

They reached the corner of the field, but no shanty lay near them and Roddy dared not go far from the fence.

Hope was growing very sleepy, she said, and was quite happy. And so they took the other side of the field, more slowly now, clinging closer to the wire, beating step by step against a wall of snow.

The night spun out into hours and days, into years of ceaseless storm, and still the fence stretched interminably before them, Hope leaning on Roddy and Roddy with bent shoulders leaning against the wind.

Then there came a time of doubting into

Roddy's mind, and then long hours when he stopped thinking, and carried Hope in his arms, and struggled; and then a time when death grew sweet, because it would bring rest and sleep, and then a time when he wondered about heaven, and whether God would forgive him because he would have slain Charlie; and then æons of dogged mechanical strife.

VII

VII

FRIDA ERICSDOTTA was not rightwise, and sat in her shanty, rocking herself by the stove.

And what was it to her that two people stood looking into each other's eyes by the light of her solitary candle; looking into each other's eyes, and speaking as though she were not?

They had come in to shelter from the storm and were welcome, so that they would let her alone with her thoughts.

She thrust more wood into the fire and talked to herself, with her eyes upon the little dancing flames. They were lovers, she supposed, and she knew what that meant; for once she had had lovers of her own, who had talked to her tenderly, even as this big man was talking to the girl with the shining eyes.

Then Hope held Roddy from her when he would have kissed her and shook her head.

"You must go back," she said.

"Go back?"

Roddy did not understand.

"He is out there—somewhere—fallen down—by the fence. He will die, Roddy."

And Roddy was in his kingdom, and safe, and her eyes were upon him, her awakened eyes, bright as he had never seen them before.

"Go back?" he asked.

Surely this could not be duty's way. And then with a sudden revulsion of feeling he remembered that he had come back to build with the motto of the Lavilles in his heart.

The storm echoed about the shanty.

"It's my repentance," she said a little breathlessly.

Then he gathered her to his arms with hot kisses.

"But you'll go?" she asked and he looked long into her eyes.

"Why, yes," he said at last, and took up his cap.

VIII

VIII

And with the romance must necessarily end the story, though indeed it has but led to gates through which the best of futures shines. For surely never in this round world's history has a fairer country waited for the truest type of commonwealth. May the builders build well.

And if for the purposes of satisfying curiosity two scenes must be included to round off the whole, one of them would be a long hall, built of wood (it will be brick next year) crowded with men, lean faced and earnest; and Roddy would be on the platform, winning his way into their hearts rather by a certain directness of utterance than any eloquence of language, winning his way slowly maybe, but winning.

And the other would be a summer afternoon with the sunlight on the wheat.

"It's a good life," says Roddy. "I am glad you did not give it up."

Charlie looks at him with steady eyes.

"Yes, it's the best life going, even for a cripple."

Then he glances at the maimed arm and its iron hand and laughs.

"But I'm getting along first rate and the hook is quite useful."

"And she is coming out to you?"

"In the fall."

"Shake hands on it. You're a very lucky fellow."

And presently as Charlie leaves them, striding down the trail, Roddy and Hope stand at the doorway, looking after him, looking out over the bright fields.

Roddy is more than ever contented to-day, for Hope, half proud and half shy, and a little frightened, has just told him a secret.

And in a measure, it is the same message as that of the wheat, and in the promise of both life looks very good.

And if there be any who have read this story and guessed its parable, let Roddy stand before them as a young and lustier people, upon whom in days unborn our more decadent East shall come to lean; the true Heir, bred of the old traditions, but the product of a new and simpler life; the true Heir, sound and sane and intrepid, facing the future in the might of an optimism, upon which in years to come shall be built the Kingdom of God.

THE END

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